



RESISTING THE ROMANS
HOW BRITISH TRIBES DEFIED THE LEGIONS

HISTORY

MAGAZINE

BRITAIN'S BESTSELLING HISTORY MAGAZINE

February 2022 / www.historyextra.com

WHO IS BRITAIN'S GREATEST MONARCH?

12 historians select the
most successful kings
and queens since 1066

Scandalous Georgians

Sex and satire in the 18th century

Seances, spirits and Sherlock Holmes

Arthur Conan Doyle's
obsession with the
supernatural

The Nazis' Soviet nightmare

How Operation
Barbarossa cost
Hitler the war



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“ This month, Queen Elizabeth II is set to reach an unprecedented milestone as she becomes the first British monarch to celebrate her platinum jubilee. But is Britain's longest-reigning sovereign also its greatest? We asked 12 historians to nominate **their choice of the country's most accomplished monarch**; you'll find their selections on page 20. No doubt you'll have your own thoughts on the matter, and please do share those with us through the usual channels.

Elsewhere, we're returning to the first century AD and the arrival of Roman legions in Britain. How did the island's inhabitants respond to the invasion? In his piece on page 50, Miles Russell digs into this question, focusing on the **Durotriges tribe of south-western Britain**. For decades it was thought that Iron Age Britons had engaged the Romans in a series of bloody battles, but recent discoveries have radically changed our understanding of these interactions.

Like many of you, I'm sure, I've long been a fan of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Arthur Conan Doyle's brilliant detective is a stand-out character of English fiction – and, seemingly, the embodiment of rational thinking. So it may come as a surprise to learn that **Holmes's creator was a fervent believer in spiritualism**, as well as an advocate for the existence of fairies. In their fascinating article on page 57, Fiona Snailham and Anna Maria Barry explore Conan Doyle's multi-faceted character and reveal that he was far from the only one seeking supernatural answers to the traumas of the age.

Rob Attar

Editor



THREE THINGS I'VE LEARNED THIS MONTH

1. Stonehenge was a present

There are plenty of excellent gift ideas for history lovers, but I'd never considered ancient monuments as an option. Yet in 1915 a barrister apparently bought Stonehenge as a present for his wife (page 49).

2. A big, bold construction

I've spent plenty of time in Broadcasting House over the years, but was still amazed to learn about the scale of its construction – requiring 2,630,000 blocks of white stone (page 34).

3. Unexpected origins

One of the many facts to emerge from Priya Atwal's *Explore* piece was that the Tudor building now housing a small museum in Norfolk had been purchased for this purpose by the son of the last maharajah of the Sikh empire (page 94).



THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS



Miles Russell

"It's long been thought that all the tribes of Iron Age Britain vigorously resisted the Roman invasion, with some fighting to the death inside their hillfort enclosures. Archaeology, however, is telling us a very different story."

Miles explores tribal responses to the Roman invasion of Britain on page 50



Penelope J Corfield

"The interlinking between the past and present is the thing that fascinates me most: what we can learn from the past, and also how the past influences us. I don't take the view that we're in a separate capsule looking back – we're part of a big, big process."

Penelope discusses her new book about 18th-century Britain on page 76



Francis Young

"Folklore is something that unites Great Britain. Variations of the same stories are told from shore to shore, while figures like Arthur and Merlin provide a common mythical story that builds an identity for the whole island."

Francis traces Britons' enduring fascination with folklore on page 64



Stephen Bourne

"Alfred Fagon played a crucial role in the development of a new kind of black theatre by writing plays that truthfully reflected the lives of African-Caribbean settlers in postwar Britain"

Stephen introduces the life and legacy of a pioneering Jamaican-born playwright on page 72

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Subscriptions & back issues
BBC History Magazine,
PO Box 3320, 3 Queensbridge,
Northampton, NN4 7BF. Basic
annual subscription rates:
UK: £48, Eire/Europe: £67,
ROW: £69



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Stephen Bourne introduces Alfred Fagon, a writer who helped transform black British theatre in the 1970s and 80s



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EVERY MONTH

This month in history

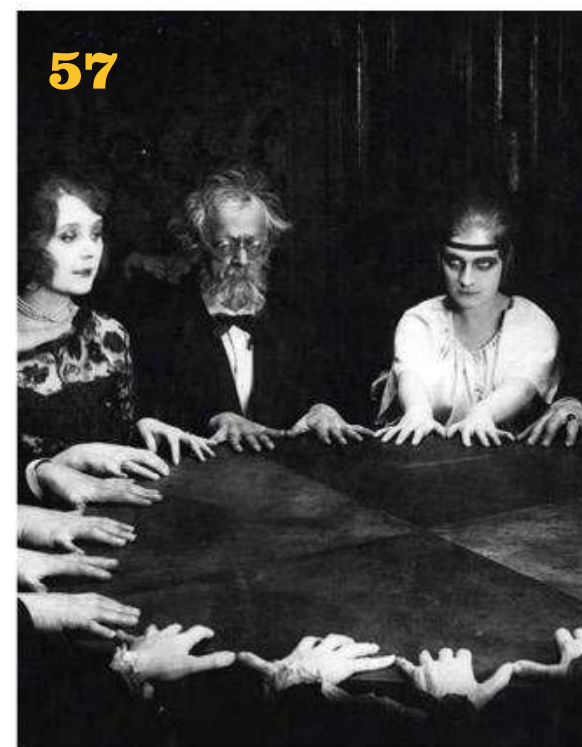
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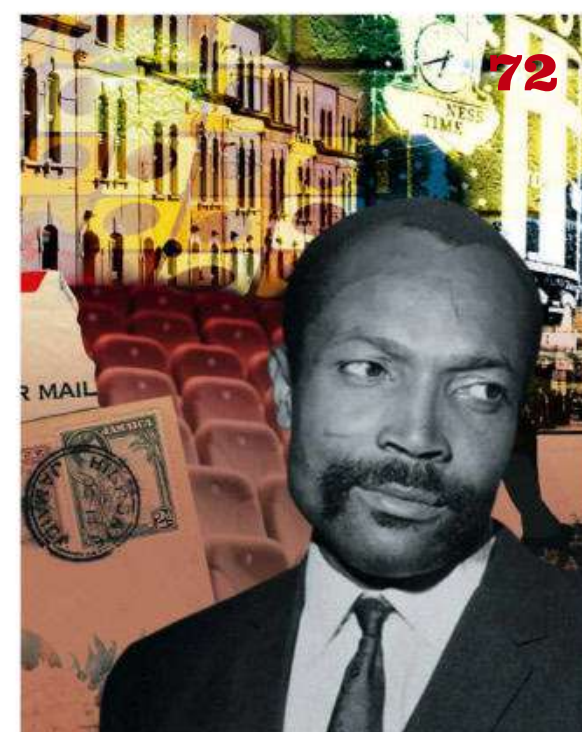
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EYE-OPENER

Hidden figures

Seemingly depicting ghostly figures, perhaps in negative, the image above is in fact evidence of an early sketch by Dutch artist Rembrandt of his famous 1642 work commonly known as *The Night Watch* – discovered beneath the painting itself.

The complex nature of the finished artwork means that experts have long believed that Rembrandt must have created a preparatory drawing on the canvas, but this is the first time the theory has been proven correct. A team of art historians, restorers and technical experts at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam used the latest imaging techniques to scan the painting,

which revealed traces of calcium contained within the chalk-rich paint that Rembrandt used to create the sketch.

The resulting image features a number of subtle differences from the more familiar version, including the existence of several pointed spears towering over the assembled military figures, and feathers in the hat of the figure in the centre of the group.

The discovery was made as part of an ongoing project to explore the painting ahead of planned conservation work next year – the first time that the masterpiece has been fully restored in more than 40 years.



Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (above) and the newly discovered sketch (main picture), which features a number of differences from the final painting

TALKING POINTS

Rewriting wrongs?



The ways in which historians reinterpret the past – and the dangers inherent in doing so – have proved a hot topic in recent months. **ANNA WHITELOCK** charts the latest developments

Writing in the *New Statesman* in December, historian and broadcaster **David Olusoga** (@DavidOlusoga) declared: “Historians should repeatedly point out that the ‘rewriting of history’ is not some act of professional misconduct but literally the job of professional historians.” Other Twitter historians agreed, in strident terms. **David M Perry** (@Lollardfish), for instance, responded with an all-caps “LITERALLY OUR JOB.” Another **David** (@HistoryDavid) concurred, issuing the rallying cry that “it’s time to fight for the soul of the discipline – misinformation is destroying history’s credibility”. **Corinne Fowler** (@corinne_fowler) made the important point that “if we want historians to share their research or assist institutions without being fashioned into targets for hatred, intimidation and smear campaigns we need to act. Today it’s someone else. Tomorrow it could be you.”

Reflecting on 1930s Germany, **Sir Richard Evans** (@RichardEvans36) wrote: “Rewriting history, done with due regard to the constraints imposed by the evidence, is fine – normal, indeed, for the historical profession. What’s not fine or normal is deliberate distortion, manipulation of the

evidence, omission or invention – as, for example, with Holocaust denial.” To which

Roger Moorhouse (@Roger_Moorhouse)

responded: “I suppose the test here is whether the rewriting and reinterpretation is being done honestly or not. After all, the Nazis and Soviets rewrote history, but we wouldn’t accept that as merely ‘part of the process’. [In my opinion] some of the modern rewriting falls into that same category.”

N647 (@night647) also sought to make a distinction between the various forms of rewriting. “If history is rewritten to fix misconceptions or previous mistakes, to try and get a more accurate history, sure... but when it is done under a political standpoint, you are no longer a historian, you are a propagandist.” That prompted **Jonathan Dallimore** (@jvdallimore) to ask: “Isn’t ‘fixing misconceptions’ often political? I’d say it is and I’d say it’s a good thing, especially if the original misconceptions were shaped largely by political forces.”

The final words on this subject, for now, go to **Susan Wabuda** (@Susan Wabuda), who wrote: “When people raise new questions about the past, the role of historians is to provide new explanations.” As she went on to explain: “This is what I tell people at the supermarket who accuse me, as a historian, of ‘rewriting the past’. I say: ‘But you have questions you didn’t have before, right? You deserve a satisfying answer, based on evidence, that makes sense.’ And they like my answer.”

I agree – and, on a more minor point, I’m also impressed by how much more interesting Susan’s shopping trips are than mine! **H**

Anna Whitelock is professor of history at City, University of London

// The test here is whether the rewriting and reinterpretation is being done honestly or not //



Join the debate at twitter.com/historyextra



The nail had been embedded in the right heel and ankle of a man aged between 25 and 35 at the time of his unpleasant death

ARCHAEOLOGY

Evidence of Roman crucifixion found in UK

It was a small discovery – a nail of just a few inches long, hammered through a skeleton’s heel. Yet it’s been hailed as both the best evidence yet of Roman crucifixion and the first example of its kind ever uncovered in the UK.

The remains, dating from between AD 130 and 360, were found in a previously unknown settlement at the site of a planned housing estate in the Cambridgeshire village of Fenstanton. Twelve other nails were also located around the skeleton – indicating that the man may have been carried to his grave on a stretcher-like board after death. Experts believe this supports the theory he had been crucified, as such a method of conveyance would have been useful in cases of corpses left to decompose on the cross.

Little is known about the individual, but this method of execution is thought to have been restricted to members of the lower classes, rebels and enslaved people. His legs also bear evidence of wasting or infection, possibly due to having been bound or shackled.

There are only three other possible known examples of crucifixion from this era, in Jerusalem, Italy and Egypt. “The lucky combination of good preservation and the nail being left in the bone has allowed me to examine this almost unique example when many thousands have been lost,” said University of Cambridge osteologist Corinne Duhig. “This shows that the inhabitants of even this small settlement at the edge of empire could not avoid Rome’s most barbaric punishment.” **H**

IAN MORRIS/ALBION ARCHAEOLOGY



HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**



Emmett Till's mother weeps as her son's coffin is lowered into its grave. US authorities have been reinvestigating the boy's murder

▲ Emmett Till murder investigation ends without charges

A US government inquiry into a 1955 killing that became a pivotal moment in the development of the nascent US civil rights movement has closed without issuing any charges. Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was accused by a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, of whistling at her in a store in the small Mississippi community of Money in August 1955, and was then kidnapped, tortured and murdered by her husband and half-brother. Both were found not guilty by an all-white jury, although they later admitted the crime in a magazine interview the next year.

In 2017, US professor Timothy Tyson published a book quoting Till's accuser as disavowing her court testimony. The claims led the Department of Justice (DoJ) to reopen the case and the FBI to interview the woman, who denied recanting her statement. The DoJ also pointed to the fact that Tyson was unable to provide full recordings of his interviews, concluding that there was "insufficient evidence to prove that [Bryant] ever told the professor that any part of her testimony was untrue". Tyson continues to stand by his claims.

Second World War bomb explodes in Munich ▼

Four people were injured when a Second World War bomb blew up near a Munich railway station in December. The device, estimated to have weighed 250kg, exploded as a result of drilling work being carried out near the city's Donnersberger Bridge. British and American forces dropped around 1.5 million tonnes of bombs on Germany during the conflict, of which an estimated 15 per cent are thought not to have detonated. As a result, such devices are discovered fairly often during construction work, although explosions are rare.



The bomb blew up during work to construct a tunnel near Munich's main railway station

▼ Archaeologists find Aztec altar containing human ashes

Experts in Mexico City have discovered a 16th-century altar including a pot containing human ashes. It's thought that the altar, unearthed alongside ceramic figures such as that pictured below, would have been located in the courtyard of a family home in what was then the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán. The find has been dated to within a century after 1521, when conquistador Hernán Cortés defeated the city's Aztec ruler. Archaeologists believe that the altar's position beneath layers of adobe suggests that the family deliberately hid it from occupying Spanish forces.



▲ Roman mosaic "is first of its kind unearthed in the UK"

A villa complex containing a huge mosaic depicting scenes from Homer's *Iliad* has been uncovered beneath a field in Rutland. The artwork (pictured above) measures 11 by 7 metres, and features Greek warrior Achilles in battle with Trojan prince Hector. It's the first known example in the UK to feature imagery from the ancient Greek epic poem, and experts believe that the complex was occupied in the third or fourth century AD by a wealthy person with knowledge of classical literature. Further excavations are set to take place at the site throughout 2022.

English coin "may be earliest yet discovered in Canada" ▼

Experts working at a site on the Canadian island of Newfoundland have uncovered what may be the oldest English coin yet found in the country. The silver "Henry VII half groat" was minted in Canterbury in the final decade of the 15th century and is roughly the size of a ten-pence piece.

The coin (pictured) was found at the site of Cupers Cove, the first English settlement in Canada, established after settlers landed in 1610 – meaning that it was more than a century old when it was lost. "Some artefacts are important for what they tell us about a site, while others are important because they spark the imagination. This coin is definitely one of the latter," said archaeologist William Gilbert. "One can't help but wonder at the journey it made, and how many hands it must have passed through." **H**





MICHAEL WOOD ON... THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF ÆTHELSTAN

// Æthelstan's assemblies are seen as the origin of the English parliament //

Who was the greatest British monarch? There's a nice debate for a winter's evening! In this issue, 12 historians nominate their choices – and I'm sure

you'll have your own thoughts, too. A few weeks ago, *The Rest Is History* podcast ran a similar exercise, though specifically about English monarchs – and it yielded a big surprise. Topping the poll, which attracted some 84,000 voters, wasn't one of the usual suspects – Elizabeth I, Victoria, Edward I, Henry II or William the Conqueror – but... wait for it... Æthelstan. There was talk of a fix, and I have to say that some influential advocates clearly had an axe to grind (indeed, I was dubbed the "Team Æthelstan coach!"). Nonetheless, it was an intriguing result.

Such debates prompt the question: what *is* greatness? In the 1120s, historian William of Malmesbury praised Æthelstan as the greatest pre-Conquest king: "The common opinion is that no one more versed in the law or learned in Latin letters had ever governed the state." True, that was only 200 years after Æthelstan's reign; clearly, many great rulers came later. But William's words point to the attributes deemed key to early medieval kingship, emphasising that learning and rulership should be inseparable. There have been few times in history when the idea of the philosopher king was more real than in the Carolingian Renaissance.

Of course, the gap between idea and reality was huge. Tenth-century England was a place of cruelty and injustice; rulers fought to maintain allegiances and to create order amid tides of violence. "I am sorry our peace is so badly

kept as I see is everywhere the case," said Æthelstan, "and my advisers say I have put up with it for too long."

Our sources are so fragmentary that we inevitably see Æthelstan through a glass darkly. Did he actually *intend* all the new beginnings that we see during his reign? Did he have what President Bush senior called the "vision thing"? Certainly, there were those who thought so at the time, though Æthelstan's idea of England was overambitious – he bombarded his councillors with ideas, not all of which worked – and his imperium partly collapsed on his death. Despite the failures, though, his template for an Anglo-Scandinavian state, with wide concessions to local feeling, survived to be bequeathed to later generations.

There were several key strands to this achievement: law, governance, coinage and assembly politics – indeed, his national assemblies are seen now as the origin of the English parliament. After the devastation of the Viking invasions, he also tried to reinvent England as a holy land. A Tudor story says that he ordered a vernacular translation of the Gospels – a precursor to those of Wycliffe and Tyndale.

These surely add up to a special achievement, harsh as his politics were. (His wider rule was sustained through coercion: the payment of tribute, giving hostages, attendance in the king's court.) However unpalatable these methods seem to us today, the goals in such violent times were peace and, in Christian terms, a just society.

Much about Æthelstan will remain a mystery. He was 30 when he came to the throne – he had already lived two-thirds of his life – and we have only the tiniest hints about his earlier intellectual formation. We would know much more if the full-length biography found by William of Malmesbury had survived. Sadly, though, it is gone, probably in Henry VIII's heritage bonfire of the Reformation. We have only a precious few pages of precis by William, plus 64 lines of fairly closely worked verse. These tell us a little about how 10th-century people saw him: as affable and approachable to the poor, "setting aside the pride of kingship out of feeling for their poverty".

When *The Rest Is History* debate started, like most people I assumed Elizabeth I would walk it. A woman of extraordinary composure, courage and intelligence who – after four changes in state religion in two decades, marked by persecutions and burnings – steadied the ship through stormy waters. She gambled all on living long enough to see England through its existential religious crisis. But Æthelstan's, too, was a great and lasting achievement. Shadowy as he remains, he is the presiding genius of the early English state. Most of all, his unexpected win opens up the debate in new ways – and that's always a good thing in history. **H**

» To find out which **British monarchs** were selected as the greatest by our expert historians, turn to page 20

ILLUSTRATION BY FEMKE DE JONG

..... Michael Wood

is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series, and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021). His Twitter handle is @mayavision

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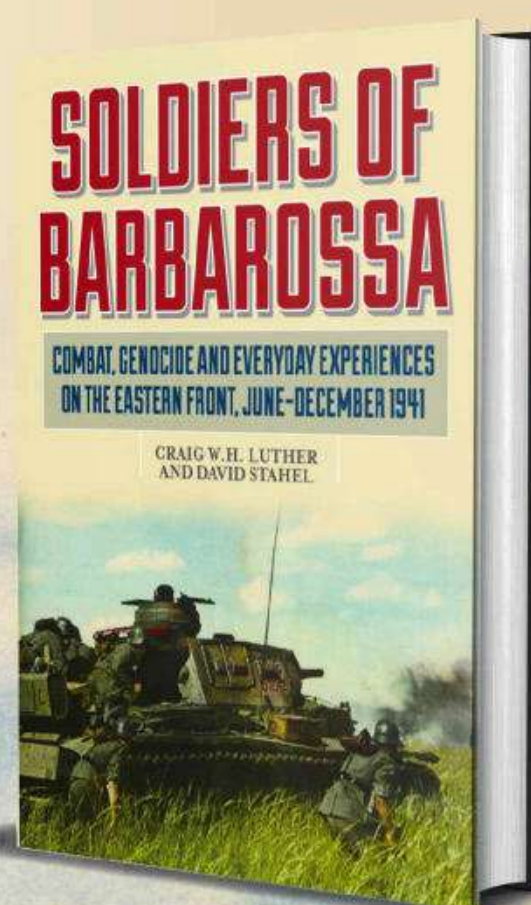


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ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in February in history

10 FEBRUARY 1355

Oxford students spark a riot

A row over bad wine spills over into violence

It was St Scholastica Day in 1355 and Oxford's students were in the mood to celebrate. Among them were Walter de Spryngeheuse and Roger de Chesterfield, who went for a drink at the Swindlestock Tavern on the Carfax junction, but they ended up painting the town much redder than they had anticipated.

No sooner had the students ordered some wine than passions rose. It began with the pair complaining that the wine was poor and demanding fresh drinks. The landlord refused. A few terse words were exchanged, peppered with "stubborn and saucy language". The students started throwing wine and hit the barman with his own pot.

The argument degenerated into a rolling brawl, with more students and locals piling in. Townsfolk rang the bells at one church to call for aid; the students rang the bells at another. People arrived with cudgels, clubs, even bows and arrows. The university's chancellor, Humphrey de Cherlton, tried to act as peace-maker, but retreated after somebody shot arrows at him. That was just the beginning.

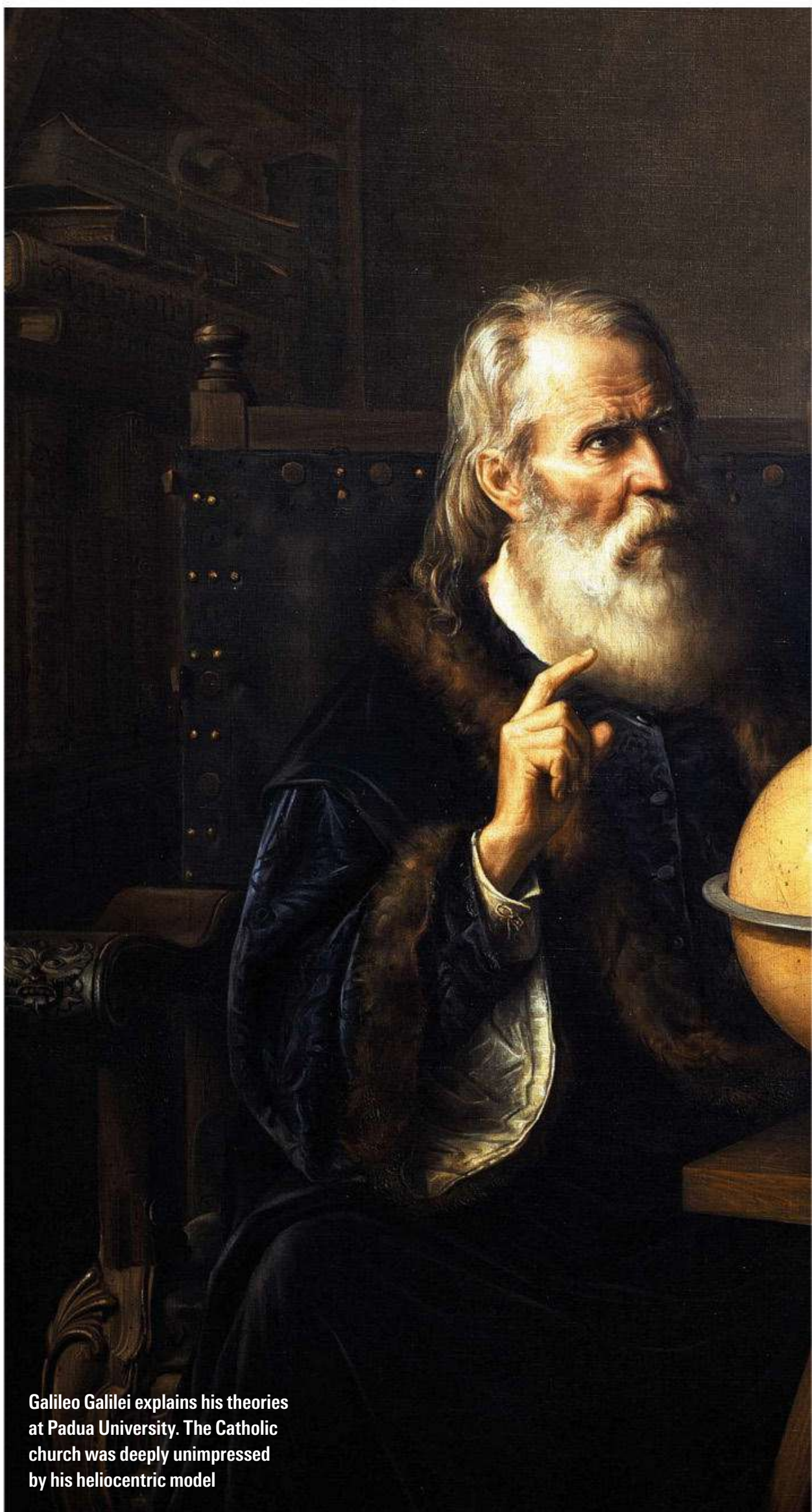
The next day, 11 February, thousands of people rampaged through the streets and laid siege to inns and hostels, killing any scholars they found. "Havoc! Havoc!" they chanted.

"Smite fast, give good knocks!"

Three days later, the rioting finally died down. At least 60 students and 30 townspeople had been killed.



An illustration of the 1355 riot between the "town" of Oxford and "gown" of the university, which claimed at least 90 lives



Galileo Galilei explains his theories at Padua University. The Catholic church was deeply unimpressed by his heliocentric model

OXFORD UNIVERSITY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN/GETTY IMAGES

A 1936 election poster calling on the Spanish to "vote for the Popular Front"



16 FEBRUARY 1936

In Spain, the last democratic election for more than 40 years is held. Months later, generals launch a coup to overthrow the elected left-wing *Frente Popular* (Popular Front) coalition government, triggering the Spanish Civil War.

26 FEBRUARY 1616

Galileo is ordered to abandon his astronomical ideas

The Catholic church lays down the law against the heliocentric model of the solar system

The Pisan polymath Galileo Galilei had begun observing the night sky through his telescope in 1609, and published his findings in the treatise *Sidereus Nuncius* (Starry Messenger) – including notes on the moons of Jupiter and phases of Venus – the following year. While monumental in the history of observational astronomy, his work landed him in hot water.

The problem: Galileo's observations placed the sun at the centre of the solar system and relegated the Earth to a mere orbiting planet, contradicting the geocentric theory of the Alexandrian writer Claudius Ptolemy – the accepted position of the Catholic church. His tract sparked a debate that raged for years. By early 1615, Dominican friar Tommaso Caccini was loudly pressing the Inquisition to crack down on Galileo's heretical ideas. In one sermon, he suggested that astronomy contravened biblical teachings, quoting a line from the Acts of the Apostles: "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

Eventually, the Inquisition convened a special commission of theologians, or "qualifiers". It took just five days to declare Galileo's notion as "foolish and absurd in philosophy, and formally heretical since it explicitly contradicts in many places the sense of Holy Scripture". Pope Paul V ordered one of the most respected thinkers of the day, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, to share the verdict with the man himself.

So it was that, on 26 February, Bellarmine summoned Galileo to his house in Rome and ordered him "to abstain completely from teaching or defending this doctrine and opinion or from discussing it". In Bellarmine's words, Galileo must "abandon completely... the opinion that the sun stands still at the centre of the world and the Earth moves, and henceforth not to hold, teach or defend it in any way whatever, either orally or in writing".



An aerial shot of the Pypliai mound, one of the possible locations of the Pilėnai hillfort where thousands killed themselves in 1336



25 FEBRUARY 1336

After a long and bloody siege, the approximately 4,000 pagan defenders of the hillfort at Pilėnai, Lithuania, set fire to their belongings and slaughter one another with axes rather than fall into the hands of the conquering Teutonic Knights.



Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean's disappearances in 1951 made front-page news, although it was not immediately clear that they were spies who had escaped to the USSR

11 FEBRUARY 1956

Soviet spies break cover

Two members of the "Cambridge Five" spy ring surface to meet journalists

It was a dreary Saturday in February 1956 when Richard Hughes got the call. On the line was a man from the Soviet news agency TASS, who told Hughes to present himself at room 101 of the Hotel National at 8pm before putting down the phone. As *The Sunday Times* man in Moscow, Hughes

was never going to ignore such an enigmatic invitation. When he arrived at the room, he found that the only other British guest there was another reporter, Sidney Welland of Reuters. Two men then appeared from the shadows, announcing themselves as Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean.

Hughes recognised the names immediately. Burgess and Maclean were British diplomats who had vanished in the summer of 1951. It had turned out that they had been passing secrets to the Soviet Union since the mid-1930s, after being recruited to the communist cause while students at the University of Cambridge. Having been tipped off by a fellow traitor, Kim Philby, they had taken a ferry to St Malo, a train to Paris and another to Zurich, then a flight to Prague before heading to Moscow. The British soon worked out what had happened, but there had been no official confirmation – until now.

As press conferences go, Burgess and Maclean's appearance was a bit of a let-down. They simply handed out copies of a prepared statement and refused to answer questions. The statement claimed that "neither of us have ever been communist agents" and insisted that they had flown to the USSR only to promote "better understanding between the Soviet Union and the west". But they had become "convinced from official knowledge in our possession that neither the British nor, still more, the American government was at that time seriously working for this aim" – so they had chosen to stay.

For the British authorities, the news was a stunning humiliation. And the *Daily Mirror* knew exactly what to blame: the "monstrous stupidity" of the Whitehall establishment, whom it characterised as "intellectuals, the Old School Tie brigade, long-haired experts and the people-who-know-the-best-people".



A group of black men in Baltimore lead a procession to celebrate the ratification of the 15th Amendment

3 FEBRUARY 1870

Black Americans are guaranteed the vote

The 15th Amendment cements fundamental rights

Although the American Civil War ended in 1865, the principal disagreements rumbled on for years. The formerly Confederate South was under military occupation and political focus turned to the future of the black men and women who had been enslaved. Now citizens, were they truly treated as equals of their former oppressors? Could they vote, and serve as legislators themselves? And if attempts were made to stop them, how would the government react?

Amid rising violence in the South, some anti-slavery Republicans demanded greater protections for black voters. In February 1869, the House of Representatives drafted a 15th Amendment to the Constitution, stating that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude”. To enter law, though, the amendment had to be ratified by three-quarters of the states – and that was no small order.

Incoming president, former Union general Ulysses S Grant, insisted that the proposed amendment was “a measure of grander importance than any other one act of the kind from the foundation of our free government to the present day”. One by one, the states fell into line. At last, on 3 February 1870, the 15th Amendment became law. Black communities exploded with joy. Alas, their struggle for equal rights was far from over. **H**

Dominic Sandbrook is a historian, author and broadcaster. His new series of history books for children, *Adventures in Time* (Particular Books), is available now

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

The day **Dolly the cloned sheep** was presented to the world

BY **MATTHEW COBB**

When did people first seriously consider the possibilities of cloning?

The roots of cloning go back to the late 19th century, but a major breakthrough came when scientists “reprogrammed” a frog egg cell with DNA in 1952, producing two identical individuals. A few years later, John Gurdon applied this principle to frog gut cells – work for which he subsequently won a Nobel Prize – but none of these grew into adults, and cloning mammals proved more difficult still.

How was Dolly the sheep cloned, and what was the public reaction?

In 1996, researchers at the Roslin Institute in Edinburgh replaced the genetic material in a sheep egg cell with DNA from an adult cell. While hundreds of embryos were created, only one survived to term. Born in July, the cloned lamb was named Dolly after the singer Dolly Parton (a crude joke originating from the fact that her genetic material had come from a mammary gland cell). And on 22 February 1997, 25 years ago this month, Dolly’s existence was announced to the world – both to media clamour and public disquiet.

In 1998, anti-genetic-modification activists tried to kidnap Dolly, but the plot failed – allegedly because all of the

sheep in the shed where she was kept looked the same. At the time, alarm about genetic engineering and food security was widespread (fuelled in part by concerns about human neurodegenerative disease linked with meat consumption), and fictional fears about human cloning rapidly resurfaced around the world. In the United States, political debates about stem cells, abortion and in vitro fertilisation got rolled up into overheated discussions about human cloning.

Suffering from arthritis and lung tumours, Dolly was euthanised in 2003, aged six. Her body can be seen at the National Museum of Scotland.

Why is it important that we remember Dolly today?

Although nearly two dozen mammalian species have now been cloned, including monkeys, the technique has not been widely applied. The rich can get their pets cloned, but, despite the promise of progress suggested by Dolly, the use of cloning in agriculture has been limited and, contrary to media brouhaha, no mammoths have been cloned. Human cells were cloned in the US in 2013, but no attempt was made to implant them.

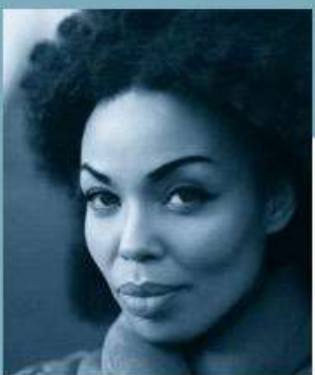
As far as we know, not even the mega-rich or mega-ambitious have tried to clone themselves. Not only would it be illegal in most jurisdictions, it would be extremely complicated and potentially catastrophic. Perhaps hundreds of embryos would have to be created, and few would survive.

Dolly and the fears and excitement she generated show how science and culture interact – how discovery mingles with fantasy. Dolly highlights how the passage from scientific discovery to everyday application is complex. Promises – or threats – of a brave new world are rarely fulfilled. **H**

Dolly was the first mammal ever cloned from an adult cell, but not everyone was delighted when the scientific breakthrough was made public in 1997



Matthew Cobb is professor of zoology at the University of Manchester and author of *Life’s Greatest Secret: The Race to Crack the Genetic Code* (Profile Books, 2015)



HIDDEN HISTORIES

EMMA DABIRI explores lesser-known stories from our past

// The film doesn't engage with one of the main drivers behind the violence //

The recent Netflix movie *The Harder They Fall* – a black western, a rarity in the genre – tells a story featuring real-life characters including Rufus Buck and Cherokee Bill. Westerns almost universally depict cowboys and outlaws as white men, yet historians estimate that about 25 per cent were in fact African-Americans – including some of the most accomplished.

Set in an almost entirely black context and starring black actors such as Idris Elba and LaKeith Stanfield, the film doesn't show the mixed ethnicity of the historical figures behind the main characters – many of whom had mixed African, European and Native American ancestry – nor the multi-“racial” society in which they lived. As such, the film doesn't engage with one of the main drivers behind the violent rampage it references: the imminent absorption of Indian Territory into the ever-expanding US.

In the summer of 1895, in the Indian Territory that would shortly become the state of Oklahoma, a group of five teenage boys engaged in a two-week bout of robbery, rape and murder. Their leader, Rufus Buck, was – like most of the gang – of mixed African and Creek Indian heritage. Their attacks appalled local white settlers, Native Americans and African-American freedmen alike.

Historians argue that the undoubtedly chilling and brutal violence wasn't entirely random. By 1895, white people outnumbered Native Americans in Indian Territory, and the US government was rapidly absorbing that land for white settlement. Buck apparently harboured fantasies that his gang's violence would incite a Native American uprising that would overrun the white settlers

and eventually reclaim the whole territory. The author Leonce Gaiter, who has written extensively about Rufus Buck, says that “His dream was impossible, and he used the same violence to achieve it that he saw all around him.”

The real Cherokee Bill (given name Crawford Goldsby), another character in *The Harder They Fall*, was also of mixed ancestry. His father, from Alabama, was of mixed heritage, while his mother was a Cherokee Freedwoman (one of the African-Americans who had been enslaved by the Cherokee before and after the removal of those Native Americans to Indian Territory, and who were emancipated after the Civil War. Many, including Bill's mother, were of mixed ancestry.)

After a troubled and unstable childhood that included spells in the notoriously abusive Indian Boarding Schools – which operated on the principle: “Kill the Indian to save the man” – Goldsby graduated to a life of robbery and violent crime. The number of people he killed is uncertain, but estimates range from 7 to 13.

Unlike in the movie, Rufus Buck and Cherokee Bill were never in the same gang, though they may have met at the Fort Smith Jail, just outside Indian Territory in Arkansas. They certainly met an almost identical fate: both were hanged for their crimes aged about 20.

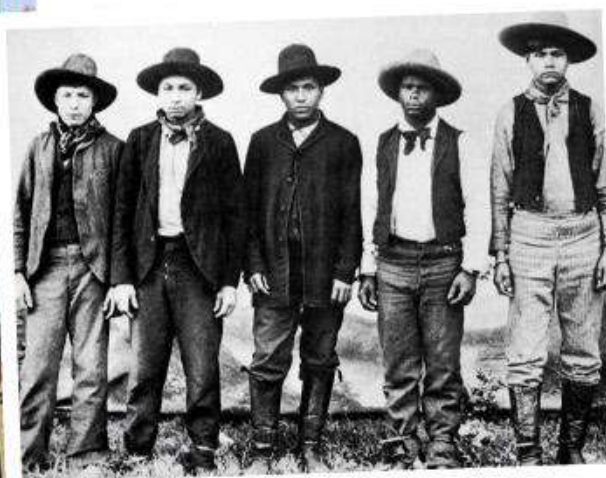
Gaiter writes that situating these characters in an overwhelmingly black context “may serve the film's purposes, but it strips Buck of his backstory. Ditto for removing him from Indian Territory. Most significantly, the movie omits Buck's stated mission – the cleansing of whites from Indian Territory,” Gaiter adds. “He had lived his life there, and... was reportedly fascinated by pulp pamphlet tales of black and Indian outlaws. The characters in these were ‘free’ to do as they pleased, and took no guff from anyone – critical to a youth attending a mission school that punished him for speaking his native Creek language. His very exposure to the white world drove Rufus Buck.”

Films are not documentaries, and their purpose is obviously not historical accuracy. And, though based only loosely on “truth”, the movie has undoubtedly introduced to a much wider audience a chapter of history that is little known and rarely spoken about. **H**

Emma Dabiri

is an author and broadcaster, and teaching fellow at SOAS University of London. Her most recent book is *What White People Can Do Next: From Allyship to Coalition* (Penguin, 2021)

Outlaw Rufus Buck (Idris Elba, centre), as depicted in Netflix western *The Harder They Fall* BELOW, RIGHT: The real Rufus Buck (centre) after his capture in 1895



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Alexander Miles, inventor of the Gx Pillow pictured with his invention

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LETTERS

A 19th-century depiction
of John Montagu –
whose career is hailed by
reader Mark JR Dennis

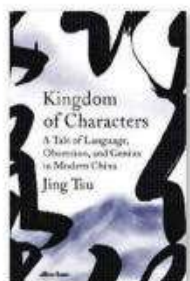


LETTER OF THE MONTH

Digging deeper

Further to Dr Wragg Sykes's fascinating feature on early female archaeologists (*Spades, Soil and Sisterhood*, December), it's worth stating that recent research suggests that Christian MacLagan may not have been the earliest female archaeologist in Britain. The discoveries of Alicia Spottiswoode, formally known as "Lady John Scott", were published earlier than MacLagan's. Both women featured in the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, but Lady John appeared in 1865 and MacLagan in the early 1870s.

Meanwhile, the art historian Dr Madeleine Pelling has recently spoken to the London-based Society of Antiquaries about some female antiquaries of the 1780s, who would now almost certainly be regarded as pioneering archaeologists. It's always difficult to claim anyone as "the first" or "the earliest", especially in an ever-growing and emerging field such as archaeology which incorporates ancillary archive research. There's invariably an earlier pioneer awaiting discovery, no matter how we define archaeologists and antiquaries!
Morag Cross, Glasgow



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is *Kingdom of Characters* by Jing Tsu. You can read our review of the book on page 80

Complicating Culloden

Timothy Jacobs' claim that "the American Revolution was the Scots' revenge for defeat at Culloden" (*Letters*, December) is a little simplistic. The first point is that the Scots were not defeated at Culloden. It was the Jacobite army, in which many English, Irish and French also served, that was defeated. The Hanoverian army likewise had many Scots in its ranks.

Those Scots who actively supported and facilitated the American side in the Revolutionary War, however, were largely Presbyterians motivated by ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, a rather different cohort from supporters of the Bonny Prince. What is resented to this day in the Highlands is the ethnic cleansing of the predominantly Gaelic speaking people perpetrated by government forces after Culloden.

Roy Pedersen, Inverness

A royal remembered

Your feature on Princess Charlotte (*The Original People's Princess*, December) noted that she has largely been forgotten, which is true. I volunteer in the Rifles Berkshire and Wiltshire Museum, and we have a fascinating item on display about her and by her. It is a manuscript of music containing four waltzes, one slow march and four quick marches, written by her with the help and supervision of Major Clegg, when they were both at Weymouth.

The 49th Regiment were stationed at Weymouth guarding members of the royal family in residence there, of which she was one. She was so impressed with them that she asked for them to be her regiment – so they were renamed the Princess Charlotte of Wales's Regiment in her honour.

Linda Robson, Salisbury

Cross indexing

Henry Hitchens' fine review of Dennis Duncan's *Index, A History of the* (*Books*, November) did not deal with the financial and other related issues associated with indexes, indexers and indexing. My late uncle, a wonderful, erudite man named John Gordon, was for many years the president of the Society of Indexers, and he used to complain bitterly to me about how indexers were treated. Many publishers were not interested in indexes. They would put it in the contract that the cost of the indexer would come out of the author's pay, or think about the index at the last minute. This

would result in minimal and shoddy indexes or indexes done as an afterthought by authors with no training in indexing, as well as the underpayment and poor treatment of indexers, and so on.

John believed that a well-done index enhanced the quality of a book, and would be of great assistance to readers and researchers. He would regale me with the beauties of a logically structured and helpful index, pointing out how the indexer had thought through both the arguments of the text and what would be most appropriate for the inquiring visitor, balancing both.

The Society of Indexers is alive and well (with international partners including Canada, where I now live) and gives out awards for the best indexes and new indexers.
Peter Timmerman, Toronto

Masons and magicians

Readers learning of the 1749 Bottle Conjurer fraud [in which adverts falsely claimed that a magician would insert himself into a wine bottle] in the December edition (*Q&A*) may have thought the culprit was some low Hogarthian rogue, but far from it. He was almost certainly John, 2nd Duke of Montagu, a good friend of the king. As well as being a practical joker, he was a military leader, failed colonial governor, animal-lover and tree planter.

He was also the first noble Grand Master of English freemasonry, and if your readers would like a better introduction to him there's a talk available on the Museum of Freemasonry's YouTube Channel. In his year of office, he set in motion the creation of the



A c1916 cigarette card featuring the badge of Princess Charlotte of Wales's Regiment, whose history fascinates reader Linda Robson

GETTY IMAGES



The battle of Culloden as depicted in an 18th-century mezzotint. Reader Roy Pedersen cautions against over-simplistic readings of the clash

first rule book for organised freemasonry. This was published as the 1723 Constitutions, and its tercentenary will be celebrated in 2023 with conferences, exhibitions and a special meeting of the United Grand Lodge of England, governing body of freemasonry in England and Wales.

Mark JR Dennis, curator, Museum of Freemasonry, London

A tree with longer roots

I love the magazine and recently became a subscriber. However, I have spotted an error in the Q&A section of the Christmas 2021 issue, in the piece about which Christmas traditions Charles Dickens was responsible for. It states that Prince Albert introduced Christmas trees to England but, while it's true that he popularised them, it was actually Queen Charlotte (wife of George III) who introduced them. Please forgive my geekdom!

Carly Fory, East Yorkshire

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IMMEDIATE MEDIA CO

Vol 23 No 2 – February 2022

BBC History Magazine is published by Immediate Media Company London Limited under licence from BBC Studios who help fund new BBC programmes.

BBC History Magazine was established to publish authoritative history, written by leading experts, in an accessible and attractive format. We seek to maintain the high journalistic standards traditionally associated with the BBC.

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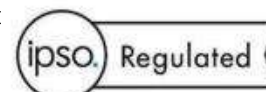
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► Page 70

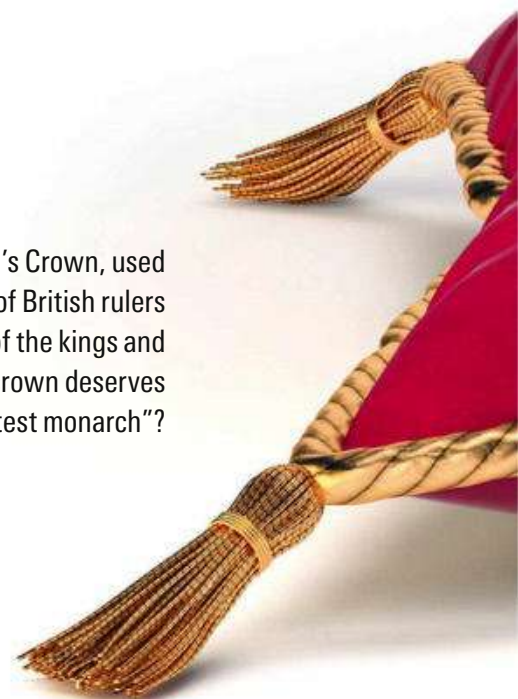


Who is Britain's greatest monarch?

This year marks the platinum jubilee of Elizabeth II, Britain's longest-serving monarch. But which of the kings and queens since 1066 made the biggest mark on history? We asked 12 experts to offer their nominations – and to explain what made each one truly great



A replica of St Edward's Crown, used in the coronation of British rulers since 1661. Which of the kings and queens to wear the crown deserves the accolade of "greatest monarch"?





The king who founded modern Scotland

David I (reigned 1124–53) wielded military might and religious reform to forge some of the nation's most enduring institutions

By **Richard Oram**

David I was medieval Scotland's greatest ruler, and is a towering figure in British history. During a reign lasting 29 years, he redrew the political map of these islands and laid the foundations both of the Scottish state that endured for four centuries and of the institutions that still frame Scottish society today.

Youngest of the six sons of Malcolm III and St Margaret, David had never been expected to rule. Raised in England at the court of the future Henry I, he trained as a knight and judicial agent of the crown. His reward was a marriage that brought the honour of Huntingdon and claims to Northumbria.

Huntingdon gave him lordship over laymen and clerics whose military skills, literacy and administrative experience he brought north when he became king of Scots (following the early deaths of five of his elder brothers) to form a new, English-influenced government. Many of them settled there to found some of medieval Scotland's greatest families, including the Bruces and the Stewarts.

Though remembered as a saintly man who

advanced the religious reform programme begun by his parents and brothers, during his early reign he used warfare to crush challenges to his power. By the 1130s he had mastered mainland Scotland, controlling a larger realm than his predecessors.

When civil war erupted in England on the death of Henry I, David marched south in support of Matilda, his niece, against her rival, Stephen. By the 1140s, David controlled most of England north of the rivers Tees and Ribble, almost capturing York and realising his wife's claim to Northumbria. That these gains barely outlasted David's life should not obscure his achievement, reflected in chroniclers' contrast of his government to the "anarchy" in the south.

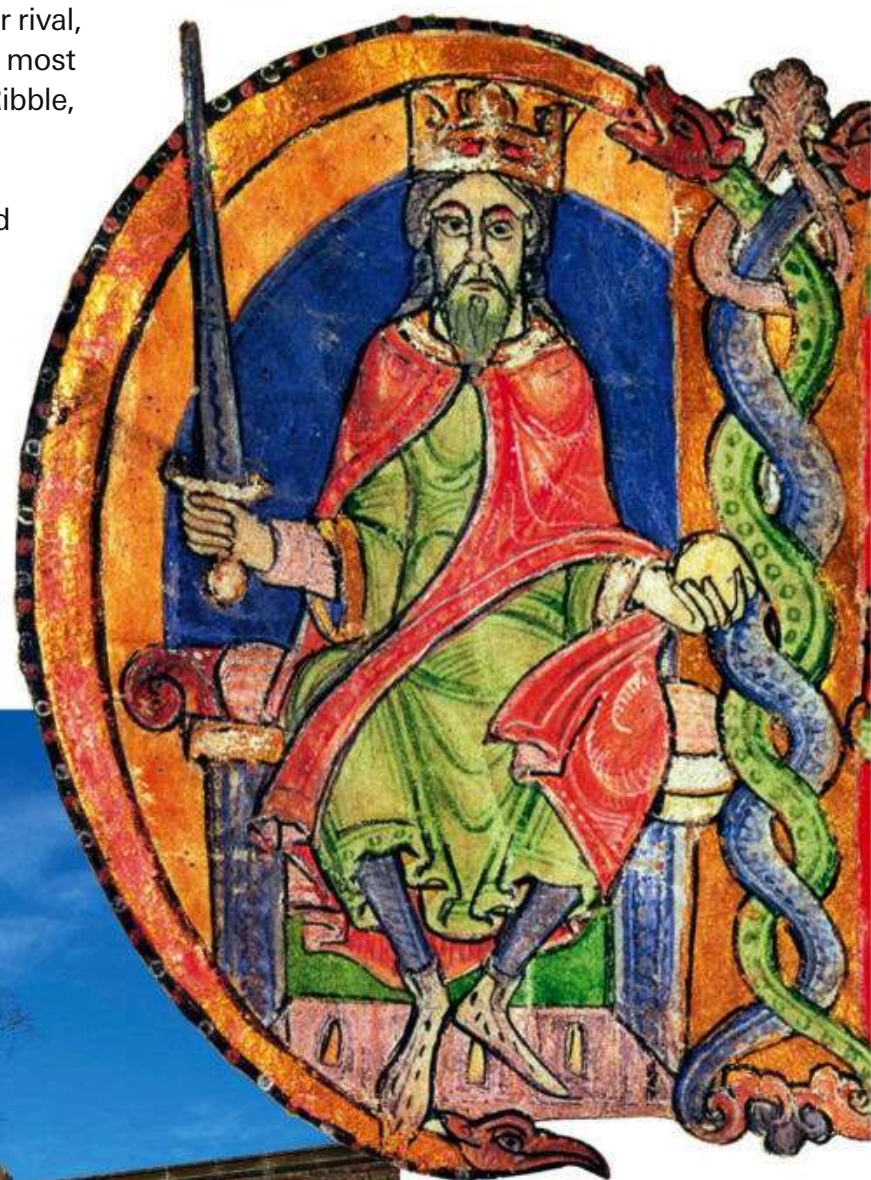
Amid the wars, David also embarked on a spectacular programme of monastic foundations and was the first British ruler to support the reformed Benedictine orders. Working with reform-minded clerics, he oversaw the reorganisation of Scotland's dioceses, establishing

the parish structure that endured until 1975. Following English models, he founded "burghs" as administrative and market hubs; many remain modern Scotland's chief towns and cities. Burgh markets became motors for international trade, oiled by the silver coinage he introduced and yielding revenues that funded his great church and castle-building projects.

By the time of David's death, the underdeveloped realm he had inherited was a dynamic, "modern" European kingdom with a self-identity that ensured its future survival.



Richard Oram is professor of history at the University of Stirling



Religious reformer

David I (pictured above, in a 12th-century illumination) was a warrior king who also launched major reforms of the church in Scotland, encouraging the foundation of monasteries such as Kelso Abbey (left)



Plantagenet pioneer

Henry II (right, in a 13th-century chronicle), the first Plantagenet monarch of England, launched an ambitious campaign of imperial expansion

The empire-builder who rewrote the law

The dominion of **Henry II** (r1154–89) may not have lasted, but his influence endured for centuries

By **Nicholas Vincent**

Great-grandson of William the Conqueror, the young Henry came to the throne as the founder of a new dynasty from Angers on the Loire. It was named “Plantagenet” after the sprig of broom (*plant de genêt*) worn as a badge by his father, Geoffrey, count of Anjou. After almost two decades of civil war in which England had been partitioned between the supporters of his mother, the Empress Matilda, and the usurper king Stephen of Blois, Henry’s first task was to restore peace. This he did in short order, seizing the castles of his more intransigent barons and demanding a return to the status quo of his grandfather’s day.

In the process, English law was rewritten, with centralised royal justice now made accessible to many who had previously been ruled by over-mighty barons. The “common law” of the modern English-speaking world is itself a product of this attempt to strengthen kingship at the expense of local baronial independence. This great leap forward was accomplished by a king whose dominion now stretched from the Cheviots to the Pyrenees.

In the north, Henry negotiated the return of the three counties of Cumberland, Northumberland and Westmorland, previously overrun by the Scots. In the far south, by his marriage to the French heiress Eleanor of Aquitaine, he acquired a claim to a vast region stretching from the Loire to the frontiers of Spain. In 1159, five years after his accession, he led a great expedition that was modelled upon the exploits of the mythical King Arthur. Failing to seize the city of Toulouse, this nonetheless heralded annexations and conquests in France that in the 1160s were to add the whole of Brittany to Henry’s “empire”.

Lord of the largest assembly of French lands ruled by any king since the fall of the dynasty of Charlemagne, Henry also looked to conquests against the Welsh, the Scots and the Irish. In 1171, he crossed to Ireland, placing Dublin under English royal authority – laying the basis of an Anglo-Irish settlement that was to persist, with mixed but highly significant consequences, into the 20th century. By 1175, following hostilities with the Scots, Henry’s flag flew over the castles of Edinburgh and Stirling.

Henry’s “empire” was not to last. Large parts of it were already lost by the time of the reign of his youngest son, John, himself the object of a backlash against the style of kingship that Henry had pioneered. Even then, however, Henry’s shadow remained indelibly imprinted upon all subsequent history – English, French, Scots, Irish and Welsh. It is evident in John’s Magna Carta and, indeed, in the earlier settlement between church and state that resulted from Henry’s bitter disputes with Thomas Becket. Aggressive, lecherous and a sly manipulator of political sentiment, Henry was in no sense a “good” man. But, as great kings of England go, it would be difficult to name his equal.



Nicholas Vincent is professor of medieval history at the University of East Anglia. His books include *John: An Evil King?* (Allen Lane, 2020)

► To read why Henry’s wife Eleanor of Aquitaine deserves to be admired, turn to page 98

The pragmatist who unified Wales

Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (died 1240) used power and politics to bring peace

By **Matthew Stevens**

The prince known as Llywelyn the Great was the most significant of Wales' native rulers. He succeeded in unifying the Welsh and resisting the English as much through shrewd diplomacy as force.

Before Llywelyn's birth, Norman occupation had reduced Wales to three competing kingdoms: Gwynedd (north-west), Powys (mid-east) and Deheubarth (south-west). His grandfather, Owain Gwynedd, had tried to create unity through force as a "Prince of [all] Wales", but Owain's death had brought political disintegration. By his teens, Llywelyn began to lead men in battle to unify Gwynedd, and by 1199, aged just 26, he was "Prince of all North Wales". He then surpassed his predecessors by proving himself not merely a warlord but also an astute politician.

His best personal decision was to marry Joan, the illegitimate but beloved daughter of King John of England. This extraordinary woman's repeated interventions with her father and, later, her half-brother Henry III proved crucial in maintaining or re-establishing good relations with England. Llywelyn also made powerful allies by marrying



Wise marriage Llywelyn ap Iorwerth (left) made a strategic match with Joan (right), influential daughter of King John of England

off his daughters Gwladus and Helen to English lords. This allowed Llywelyn to play an inside-outside game, leveraging royal favour (aided by his wife) against his Welsh enemies while using English alliances to his advantage against the king.

Capitalising on John's displeasure with rival Gwenwynwyn ap Owain of Powys, by 1210 Llywelyn had extended his domination to native-controlled mid- and south Wales. John tried to check Llywelyn's ascendancy but in 1215, while John was tussling with his English barons over Magna Carta, Llywelyn summoned a pan-Wales army and invaded

Anglicised south Wales, capturing royal Cardigan and Carmarthen. He then held a meeting of Welsh lords at Aberdyfi that was a parliament in all but name, nearly two centuries before Owain Glyndŵr's famed Machnylleth "parliament" of 1404.

From 1216 until his death in 1240, Llywelyn's fortunes went from strength to strength. He retained almost all of his gains in Wales, including those made at English expense. In his magnanimity, he was wise enough to manage indirectly the affairs of the old kingdoms of Powys and Deheubarth. He worked to establish and enforce inheritance settlements, thereby creating dependants rather than coarsely annexing territories. And, with remarkable prudence, he declined to use the title "Prince of Wales", though he advanced Welsh law and the position of the prince within it. In the hours before his death, he donned a Cistercian monk's robe as a mark of humility. He was buried at Aberconwy Abbey.

Using as much diplomacy as force, Llywelyn created political stability and relative security for Wales – which it had not enjoyed either since the arrival of the Normans, and would never again know the like under native rule.



Matthew Stevens is associate professor in history at Swansea University

The great stabiliser who bolstered royal authority

Edward IV (r1461–70 & 1471–83) was a natural leader who restored the monarchy's waning power

By **Nicola Tallis**

Edward (right), born in 1442, was the eldest surviving son of Richard, Duke of York. After his father's death at the battle of Wakefield in 1460, he became the head of the House of York in the Wars of the Roses – the three-decade fight for the English throne against the House of Lancaster. A brilliant military leader, in 1461 (aged just 18) he won victories at Mortimer's Cross – after which Henry VI was deposed – and Towton.



Edward was crowned king on 28 June 1461 but spent much of the next decade fighting for his throne. Briefly deposed in 1470, the following year he won a decisive victory at Tewkesbury that saw the death of the Lancastrian heir Edward of Westminster and, subsequently, of Henry VI. Edward's throne was now secure, signalling an end to civil war and the restoration of the authority of the crown – his greatest achievement.

A natural leader, he inspired confidence in his subjects and worked for the good of the realm. He restored firm and stable government, and brought financial stability with the introduction of the chamber system to oversee crown income. And he promoted trade with France and Burgundy, thereby boosting the

English economy and earning the admiration of his contemporaries.

Physically, he epitomised the ideal king: tall, confident and cultured, he spent lavishly on clothes, jewels, buildings and the arts to create an impression of magnificence. A contemporary described Edward's court as "the most splendid... in all Christendom". With two surviving legitimate sons, his dynasty seemed secure – till he died in April 1483, while his heir was a minor. But his achievements made him surely Britain's greatest monarch.



Nicola Tallis is a historian and author of books including *Uncrowned Queen* (Michael O'Mara, 2019)



Tudors on top

Henry VII (top left and inset), founder of the Tudor dynasty, is much misunderstood, says Sarah Gristwood: "He could be ruthless, but he could also display mercy"



The upstart who founded a dynasty

Henry VII (r1485–1509) ushered in a new era with ingenuity and ruthlessness

By **Sarah Gristwood**

Henry VII may or may not be Britain's greatest monarch but there's one accolade he surely can claim: there can't be another ruler who has been underestimated so consistently.

Henry won his throne in a way unusual even among medieval monarchs, taking to Bosworth Field with a blood claim that was thin, to put it mildly. He bolstered that claim by victory in battle and by marriage into the opposing family (a marriage, to Elizabeth of York, that would prove personally happy). But he still had to hold the throne against repeated challenges through his own ingenuity.

He bolstered the arriviste new Tudor dynasty with considerable versatility, linking it with Arthurian myth – and, through the marriage of his eldest son, Arthur, to Catherine of Aragon, with the House of Trastámara, Europe's grandest dynasty. It's a puzzle why Henry himself isn't more of a mythic figure:

a young and comparatively handsome prince, he came from across the sea to claim his kingdom in the traditional romantic way.

He could be ruthless when necessary, but he could also display mercy. Where kings had historically identified themselves through warfare, he preferred to ease England's conflicts with Scotland by marrying his daughter, Margaret, into the Stewart dynasty. Yet all anyone remembers is that, in his later years, Henry VII was overly fond of money.

Yes, his taxes – his exploitation of his feudal rights – were harsh, even unscrupulous, but perhaps they had to be. A king's liberality doesn't actually do much for the monarchy itself, however appealing it may be to those around the monarch. Henry's money-grabbing was, moreover, part of a broader campaign to raise the prestige of the crown above an overweening nobility,

and to institute an efficient professional bureaucracy.

These achievements are not glamorous, but they paved the way for a new age. A Spanish envoy said dismissively that Henry was "not a great man". But the 20th century showed that it is not necessarily the flamboyant sovereigns who do most to preserve the principle of sovereignty.

Henry ascended a contested throne that had changed hands three times in a little over two years. At his death, he left a dynasty strong enough to survive a break from Catholic Europe, a boy king, and the controversial accession of two women (three, if you count Jane Grey). We praise Elizabeth I for her abilities as a ruler even while we grumble gently about her love of money. But perhaps we should consider how the Virgin Queen was truly Henry's granddaughter. His bloodline led directly to the present royal family, but that's only one way in which without

Henry VII we would not be where we are today.



Sarah Gristwood is a historian and author. Her latest book is *The Tudors in Love* (Oneworld, 2021)

Britain's greatest monarchs



Parliament power

A picture believed to be the earliest contemporary illustration of the opening of parliament (in Blackfriars, in 1523) presided over by Henry VIII

Henry's reign saw a major expansion of the power of parliament. Parliamentary representation and the privileges of both houses were extended. The revolutionary effect of the Act of Restraint of Appeals of 1533 was to make the king in parliament the supreme authority in England. Parliamentary law became the basis of the new monarchy and, later, of constitutional monarchy – and democracy itself.

The most magnificent court in English history was created by Henry, who was one of the great royal collectors and patrons of the arts. He helped to introduce Renaissance art, sculpture and architecture to England. He was an impressive Renaissance polymath – an expert linguist, humanist, theologian, astronomer and composer. He concocted medicines, designed weapons and raised or remodelled a string of royal residences. The modern English navy owns its existence to Henry, too. His fleet of warships was the basis for Britain's future dominance of the seas. Without it, Elizabeth I's victory over the Spanish Armada and the establishment of British colonies would simply not have been possible.

National identity

Henry enhanced the standing of the monarchy and helped forge a new sense of national identity and unity. The Act of Restraint of Appeals stressed the sovereign authority of the English state, its preamble majestically proclaiming: "This realm of England is an empire, governed by one supreme head and king, having the dignity and royal estate of the imperial crown."

His true greatness, though, lay in his acute political perception. His remarkable insight, strength of will and subtle intellect equipped him to deploy all the forces and resources that underpin strong government. He averted religious and dynastic wars, suppressed rebellion and maintained peace throughout his reign. He conditioned the nobility to identify with the crown rather than their own interests, and he elevated England's status in Europe, where he helped to maintain a balance of power between his rivals, France and the Holy Roman Empire.

Henry VIII began his reign in a medieval kingdom; he ended it in what was effectively a modern state. It has been said that we are still living in the England of Henry VIII. That is the measure of his achievement – and why I think he deserves to be recognised as England's greatest monarch.



Alison Weir is a historian and bestselling author whose books include *In the Shadow of Queens: Tales from the Tudor Court* (Headline Review, 2021)

The cultural colossus who forged modern Britain

Henry VIII (r1509–47) was a polymath whose sweeping reforms are still felt today

By **Alison Weir**

It has been said that Henry VIII changed the heart, mind and face of Britain more than anyone or anything else between the Norman conquest and the industrial revolution. In the year of his accession, a Venetian accurately predicted: "For the future, the whole world will talk of him." Another Italian declared that Henry "excelled all who ever wore a crown". One contemporary wrote: "I know not where in all the histories I have read to find one king equal to him." To his contemporaries, Henry VIII was a great man – a legend in his own lifetime. Today, historians recognise that he left an extraordinary legacy: modern Britain.

Launching the English Reformation, Henry broke with the pope and founded

the Church of England with himself as its supreme head. He steered his realm through a religious revolution, dissolved the monasteries – which were by then in decline – and authorised the translation of the Bible into English. Inspired by these reforms, Henry's archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, wrote his beautiful liturgy, a great gift to the English church.

Henry also had a talent for recruiting able advisors, notably Cardinal Wolsey and Thomas Cromwell. A stickler for efficiency, he overhauled the machinery of the state and its fiscal arm. His progressive taxation schemes presaged modern financial bureaucracy, and government was centralised.

An icon for the ages

Elizabeth I (r1558–1603)

embraced both PR and pragmatism to triumph over prejudice

By **Tracy Borman**

All other contenders step aside: Elizabeth I has taken the stage. As the younger, forgotten and – in some eyes – illegitimate daughter of Henry VIII, in her early years she had little prospect of ever inheriting the throne. It is one of history's greatest ironies that her father went to so much trouble (not to mention wedding so many wives) to beget a son – yet it was Elizabeth who became his longest-reigning and most successful heir by a country mile.

Elizabeth's mother was Anne Boleyn, executed at Henry's orders on trumped-up charges of adultery when Elizabeth was not yet three years old. Anne's name was still anathema to most of Elizabeth's subjects when she inherited the throne upon the death of her half-sister, Mary, in 1558.

"It is more than a monster in nature that a woman shall reign and have empire above a man," declared the Scottish theologian John Knox, shortly after Elizabeth's accession. This was an age in which women were seen as the weaker sex in every respect – so the idea that one might rule a kingdom was preposterous. Previous examples – most recently "Bloody" Mary Tudor – had hardly inspired confidence in female sovereigns.

Feminine wiles

Rather than fight against the misogyny of her all-male government, Elizabeth cleverly pretended to share their regret that she had been born "a weak and feeble woman", and used her feminine wiles to devastating effect. When under pressure to go to war or, worse, marry, Elizabeth would employ that "feminine weakness" of indecision to buy time rather than rush headlong into disaster, as had so many monarchs before her.



Imperial foundations

The "Pelican Portrait" of Elizabeth I (c1575). Around the time this was painted, her adventurers were paving the way for a British empire

One of the greatest achievements of this master of pragmatism was to settle the vexed question of religion and establish peace and stability after one of the most turbulent half-centuries in England's history. Though she never uttered the much-quoted line about "not making windows into men's souls", it neatly encapsulates her approach.

In the first parliament of her reign, Elizabeth declared: "In the end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin." Few present believed her: it was inconceivable that a woman could rule effectively without a man by her side. But the new queen had learned from the examples of her past, and had no intention of entering the dangerous world of royal marriage and childbirth. Neither did she wish to surrender any of her hard-won power to a husband. As she put it: "I will have but one mistress here, and no master."

More than any monarch before or since, Elizabeth appreciated the power of PR. She crafted her public image to be worshipped as the Virgin Queen both during her lifetime and for centuries after her death. An exceptionally intelligent and cultured woman, she also ushered in a golden age of the arts that nurtured the likes of poet Edmund Spenser and William Shakespeare.

During Elizabeth's long reign, England emerged as a world power. The foundations of an empire were laid during the period from the 1560s to the 1580s, thanks to the exploits of the queen's adventurers, particularly Raleigh, Drake and Hawkins. Her finest hour came in 1588 when her navy (with a little help from the British weather) defeated the mighty armada of Spanish king Philip II. By then she had already seen off a succession of other rivals to her throne – notably Mary, Queen of Scots.

By the time of her death in 1603, Elizabeth had triumphed over the deep-seated prejudice that had confronted her 45 years earlier: she had made England fall in love with queens. As subjects under the Stuart dynasty reportedly chanted: "A Tudor! A Tudor! We've had Stuarts enough / None ever reign'd like old Bess in her ruff."



Tracy Borman is a historian and author. Her latest book is *Crown & Sceptre: A New History of the British Monarchy* (Hodder, 2021), and her series of HistoryExtra Masterclass lectures on the

British monarchy continues each Friday till 4 February. For more information, visit [historyextra.com/events](https://www.historyextra.com/events)



Polymathic intellectual

James VI & I, shown in a contemporary portrait, was an accomplished writer who overcame major hurdles to ascend the thrones of both Scotland and England

The Stuart intellectual who unified two warring nations

James VI & I (reigned Scotland 1567–1625, England 1603–25) employed learning to conjoin England with Scotland

By **Clare Jackson**

As the platinum jubilee of Elizabeth II approaches, it is worth noting that her Stuart predecessor James VI & I enjoyed one of the longest British reigns – as king of Scotland for 58 years from 1567 until his death in 1625. The last 22 of those years were also spent as king of England and Ireland.

The impressive length of his royal tenure is a tribute to sheer tenacity. James was crowned as a “cradle king”, aged just 13 months, following the forced deposition of his Catholic mother, Mary, Queen of Scots. His father, Lord Darnley, was murdered before James turned one. The infant king also survived violent civil wars and the rapid turnover of successive regents including his grandfather, the Earl of Lennox, who was assassinated in 1571. As an adult, James withstood assassination attempts, kidnappings and forced detentions by noble opponents. His reign as king of England might well have ended prematurely had James not insisted on a second search of the Palace of Westminster that led to the

discovery of the 1605 gunpowder plot.

A polymathic intellectual, James combined royal authority with royal authorship. An early poem, written when he was about 15, opened: “Since thought is free, think what thou will.” James, a prolific author, later published more poetry as well as theological commentaries and works on political theory, demonology and tobacco consumption. After he became James I of England, some 15,000 copies of his *Basiliikon Doron* – a manual of royal advice to his son, Prince Henry – were printed; it also appeared in Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, Swedish and Welsh.

As confessional tensions escalated across continental Europe, James deployed paper bullets in preference to military armies against his adversaries. He consistently articulated a message of religious toleration and accommodation, and called for an ecumenical council to facilitate the Protestant churches’ reunion with the papacy.

Having succeeded Elizabeth I as Eng-

land’s first Stuart monarch, James styled himself king of “Great Britain”. He urged closer political, religious and economic union between Scotland and England, saying: “Two snowballs put together, make one the greater; two houses joined, make one the larger; two castle walls made in one, makes one as thick and strong as both.”

James, whose reputation has recently undergone extensive rehabilitation, was – as philosopher John Locke later conceded – “that learned king who well understood the notions of things”. Britain’s most scholarly and intellectual monarch, he was also a humane, pragmatic and witty individual whose prolific literary output provides vivid insights into a turbulent, dangerous and fast-changing world.



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Clare Jackson is senior tutor at Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge. Her latest book is *Devil-Land* (Allen Lane, 2021)

Crisis in the Commons

William Pitt the Younger addresses the House of Commons in 1793. George III's appointment of Pitt as prime minister aimed to disrupt an unconstitutional scheme by radical Whigs, argues Andrew Roberts

Champion of the constitution

George III (r1760–1820) is often derided as a despot, yet his far-sighted political reforms remain in force today

By **Andrew Roberts**

George III instituted an invention of genius: the limited constitutional monarchy that we enjoy today, and which provides a bulwark against megalomania and political extremism. When he came to the throne in 1760, the monarchy had enormous powers, especially over the appointment of individual cabinet ministers and lord chancellors. It wasn't out of the question for a monarch to refuse royal assent to a parliamentary bill – indeed, Queen Anne had done so in 1708. The prime minister was merely *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and did not consider himself head of the government.

By the time George III died in 1820, though, cabinet ministers owed responsibility to the prime minister who, since the appointment of William Pitt the Younger in 1783, had become undoubtedly the central figure in the government. The lord chancellor, Lord Thurlow, had been dismissed on Pitt's recommendation in June 1792 – an episode that, later British premier Stanley Baldwin believed, marked the beginning of the concept of collective cabinet responsibility. "There was a very great principle at the back of that struggle," Baldwin told the House of Commons in February 1932, suggesting that George's support of Pitt over Thurlow was a key moment in the development of the British constitution.

Of course, George III's "malady" – a bipolar disorder hitherto misdiagnosed as porphyria – and the fact that he experienced bouts of debilitating mental illness during the last decade of his life, also helped drive the process whereby the cabinet became more powerful than the crown. By 1811, it was inconceivable that the

Prince Regent, George IV, might veto a parliamentary bill approved by the Commons and the Lords, yet the process of that development had been started by his father. It is a great irony that in the US, George III is still widely regarded as a despot and tyrant. That's despite the fact he revered the constitution, as established by the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, which so influenced the later US constitution.

Only on one occasion did George III – the longest-reigning British king – do anything so seemingly unconstitutional as appoint a prime minister who did not have the support of a majority of the House of Commons – Pitt the Younger, in December 1783. Yet that was done in defence of the constitution when the radical Whigs' India Bill was threatening to nationalise the East India Company, so place the subcontinent's huge resources under the control of a 15-man commission appointed by

them. The vast wealth and power this would have left in the Whigs' hands, once spent on British politics, would have overturned the constitution that George had spent so long nurturing. His disruption of this genuinely unconstitutional scheme was soon fully vindicated by Pitt's landslide victory in the general election of 1784.

George's greatest legacy today is to be found in the modern monarchy, so much of which is down to him rather than to the person who usually gets the credit – his granddaughter Queen Victoria. It was George who bought Buckingham House (present-day Buckingham Palace) as a present for his wife Queen Charlotte in 1762. He commissioned the Gold State Coach which is still used today on the grandest of State occasions. He invented the royal walkabout, instituted the Royal Enclosure at Ascot, inaugurated the annual Trooping of the Colour, and was the first monarch since Charles I to be buried at Windsor – since when all of them have been.

And, in a deeper sense, George III also set the tone for the modern monarchy. When we look at Elizabeth II, we see the same sense of financial prudence, capacity for hard work and commitment to duty as her great-great-great-great-grandfather King George III.

Andrew Roberts is a historian and writer. His latest book is *George III* (Allen Lane, 2021)



Misunderstood monarch?

A portrait of George III in his coronation robes. Though widely viewed in the US as a tyrant, he revered the constitution





European family portrait

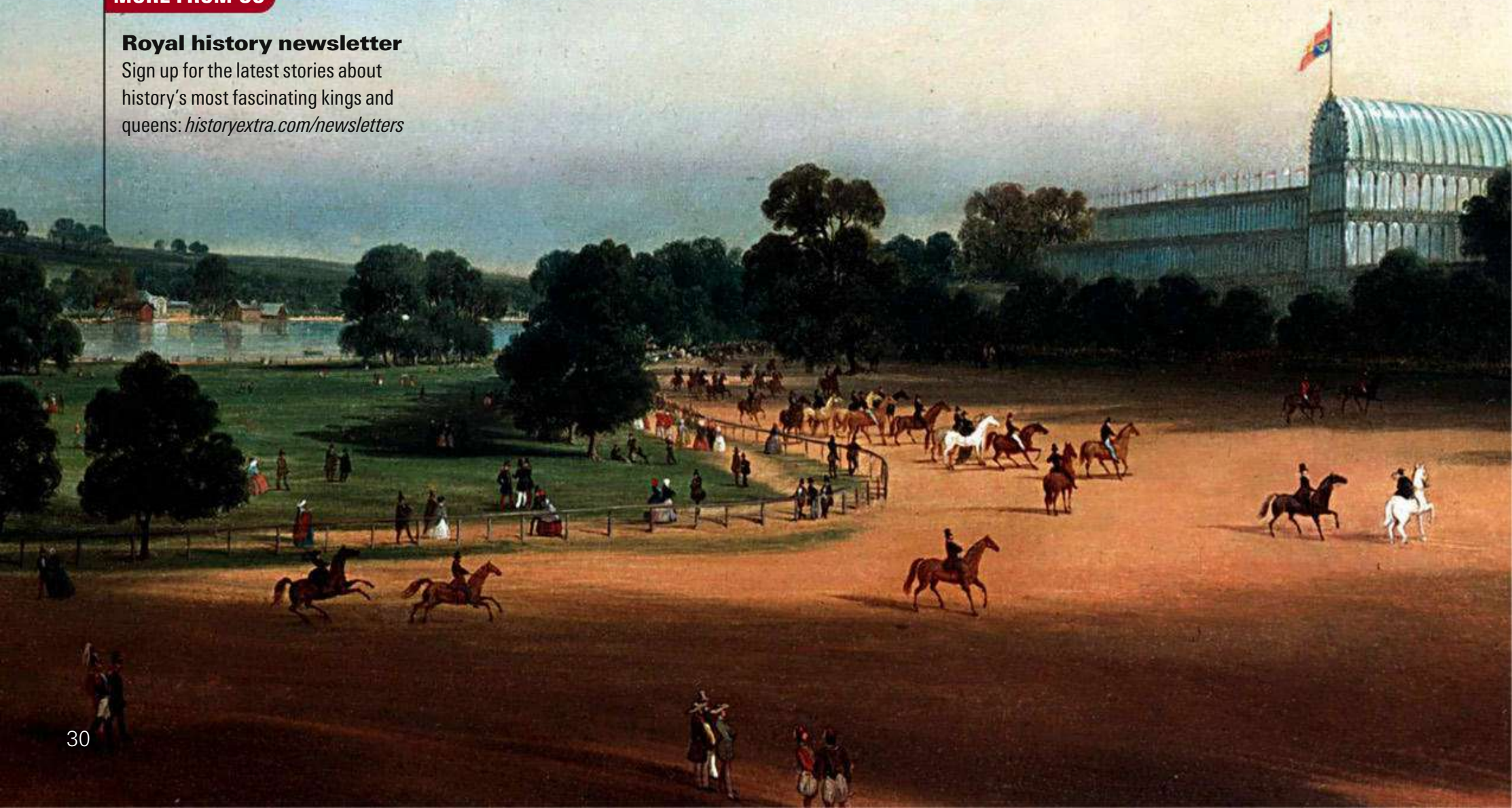
Victoria is photographed in 1898 surrounded by her children and their own families. Many of those pictured would become monarchs or parents of monarchs, including the future kings George V and George VI, standing to the queen's right. "Perhaps her greatest legacy was as the grandmother of Europe," says Shrabani Basu

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The queen who defined an age

The long reign of **Victoria** (r1837–1901) saw her strengthen the monarchy and unify a turbulent Europe

By **Shrabani Basu**

In June 1887, teeming crowds lined the streets outside Buckingham Palace to catch a glimpse of Queen Victoria riding in her carriage. What they saw was an elderly woman dressed in a black gown with white lace trimmings, a necklace of pearls around her neck and a bonnet instead of a crown. Yet this demurely dressed queen had achieved a rare milestone: she was celebrating the golden jubilee of her reign. Rulers from 50 countries had been invited; riding behind Victoria's carriage were kings and princes from across Europe and India. It was a carefully choreographed display of Britain's position in the world as an empire on which the sun did not set.

In the early hours of 20 June 1837, Victoria had been woken at home in Kensington Palace and informed that her uncle, William IV, had died. Still in her nightdress, she learned that she was queen, aged just 18. Wearing the crown would not be easy. The monarchy had suffered years of disrepute, and her predecessors had not covered themselves in glory. George III had lost the American colonies, and his son and heir, George IV, was notorious for his debauchery and excess.

Monarchies in Europe were toppling. It fell on the young queen to stabilise the crown.

Despite her inexperience, she held her own. Her marriage to her cousin, Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, was a partnership that strengthened the monarchy. Together, Victoria and Albert projected the image of a virtuous and ideal family, surrounded by their nine children. Extensively photographed and recorded, they became a brand recognised and esteemed around the world. Albert's love for invention, backed by Victoria, prompted the Great Exhibition of 1851. Visited by 6 million people, its profits laid the foundations for the museums of the future in London.

Industrial innovator

Victoria went on to define an age. Under her rule, Britain enjoyed the fruits of the industrial revolution: railways, mighty bridges of iron and steel, scientific innovation, and the world's first underground train hurtling beneath the streets of London.

She was also a trendsetter. For her wedding she chose to wear white – an unusual choice for the time; today, white wedding dresses are worn by brides around the world.

Under Victoria, too, Christmas became a popular family event. Though the tradition of Christmas trees had been introduced by Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, Victoria and Albert made the feast a time of family celebration featuring the giving of gifts and the sending of Christmas cards.

After the death of her beloved Albert, Victoria wore black for the rest of her life, but returned to her role as a constitutional monarch. In her later years she became close to her Indian servant, Abdul Karim; she learned Urdu and started taking a keen interest in Indian politics, living her role as empress of India. In 1897, Victoria celebrated her diamond jubilee, a moment recorded on grainy film footage. Even at 78, she was the symbol of Britain: imposing statues of her were erected all over the colonies, and towns, buildings, rivers and waterfalls were named after her.

Perhaps her greatest legacy, though, was as the grandmother of Europe, having arranged matches for her children with royalty across the continent. During her life, Victoria held a turbulent Europe together. At her death, the fragile bonds snapped. Thirteen years later the nations of two of her grandchildren, George V and Kaiser Wilhelm II of

Germany, went to war – and the world changed forever.



Shrabani Basu is a journalist and author. Her latest book is *The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer* (Bloomsbury, 2021)



Promoting the powerhouse

The vast Crystal Palace in Hyde Park housed the Great Exhibition of 1851, which showcased the groundbreaking industrial achievements of Victorian Britain

The crisis manager

George V (r1910–36) faced catastrophes beyond his predecessors' nightmares, but his brave choices allowed the monarchy to thrive

By **Heather Jones**

George V was an unexpected king for unexpected times. A second son, he found himself heir to the throne when his older brother, Eddy, died in 1892. Becoming king in 1910, after the death of his gregarious, high-living and popular father, Edward VII, the inexperienced, poorly educated George faced historic crises on a scale unimaginable to his predecessors.

His reign encompassed Britain's first modern total war, between 1914 and 1918 – a conflict that stoked anti-monarchism across continental Europe. War-weary populations, blaming royal leaders, toppled a string of monarchies, many related to the British. Most famously, in 1917 the war triggered revolution, and communism, in Russia. At home, voting reforms in 1918 and

1928 enfranchised women and large numbers of working-class men. The labour movement became a major political force and entered government. Anti-colonial insurrections erupted in places such as Ireland, Iraq and Egypt, provoking major imperial reforms.

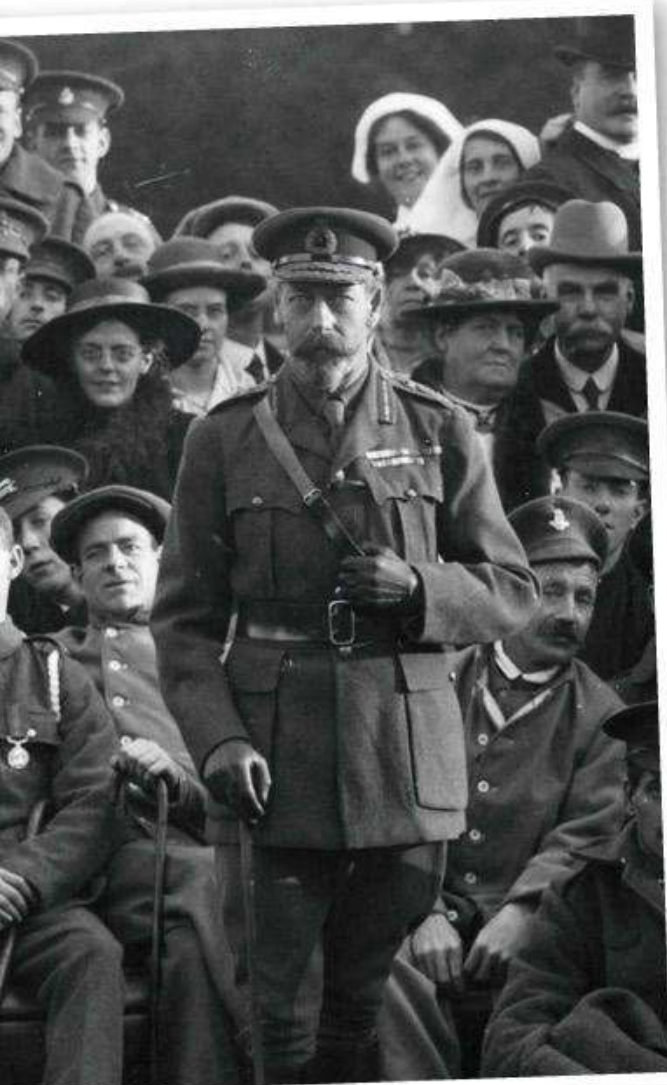
These events marked a rupture in royal history – and George V's choices proved vital. For this new era of mass politics, the king made the monarchy apolitical: from now on, the monarch would not show personal preference for any political party. He accepted democratic and imperial reforms. George V also got to know Labour leaders personally. His monarchy did not ostracise Labour but, rather, lent it respectability – something that helped integrate British socialism into the existing political system and drew it away from revolution.

George V gave the monarchy a new national image, distancing it from discredited continental European relatives and changing the dynastic name to Windsor. His were the first king's children in modern times who were allowed to marry non-royal British subjects. Above all, in the First World War George V made the monarchy central to the commemoration – and honouring – of the war dead. He showed solidarity with the population's suffering, too, eschewing luxurious food, alcohol and entertainments, and constantly visiting the war wounded, the munitions factories and the troops.

Any one of the crises George faced might have proved fatal to the British monarchy. Yet it survived – and, indeed, thrived, thanks to his choices. By the time of his silver jubilee, George V and his queen, Mary, were wildly popular. Upon his death in 1936, over 800,000 people filed past his coffin – far more than did so for George VI, or even Winston Churchill.



Heather Jones is author of *For King and Country: The British Monarchy and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2021)



Man of the people

George V during a visit to a Leeds hospital in the First World War. The king's solidarity with the British people helped ensure the monarchy's future, argues Heather Jones

A constant in a changing age

Elizabeth II (reigning since 1952) may seem removed from the modern world – but it's precisely from that distance that she derives her power

By **Tom Holland**

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The ideal of monarchy in Britain has never been a stable one. The expectations laid upon sovereigns have varied from age to age. If it is pointless to evaluate a medieval king by the standards of a 21st-century democracy, then it is also unfair to blame a queen in the 21st century for failing to bring in her own laws, or to devise national policy, or to win battles against the French. A monarch, such as Elizabeth II has been for nearly 70 years, can ultimately be judged only by the standards of the age through which she has lived. By those measures, Elizabeth has proven herself the most admirable, the most impressive monarch that Britain has ever had.

"Her Majesty's a pretty nice girl, but she doesn't have a lot to say." These words, true when the Beatles sang them in 1969, ring no less true today. The role of the monarch in contemporary Britain is to stand above the fray, to affect a studied neutrality, to serve as a symbol rather than a leader. The wellsprings of the Queen's inscrutability, however, lie as much within her character as they do within

the constitution. Just as the young Victoria had more in common with a Jane Austen heroine than with the subsequent stereotype of a Victorian, so Elizabeth II still retains the moral character of the country that stood up to Hitler. Her virtues remain those that we still as a nation, despite recent revisionism, fondly ascribe to those who endured the Blitz. A commitment to service and a stoical sense of duty are qualities that we have not entirely forgotten how to admire. To a country that shows no sign of abandoning its enduring obsession with the Second World War, the Queen serves as a living reminder of our finest hour.

Yet the paradox of her determinedly old-fashioned style is that it has enabled her to serve all the more effectively as the symbol of a country that has, over the course of her reign, experienced a quite startling rate of change. Because the second Elizabeth, unlike the first, has not stamped her age with the brilliance and flair of her image, she has been able to grow old gracefully. No wigs or thick

facepaint for her; never having set fashion, she has never had to worry about going *out* of fashion. Whether arrayed in ceremonial robes or in her trademark bright colours and pearls, Elizabeth II has always looked pretty much the same. To even the most ardent republican, she serves, as Dr Watson did to Sherlock Holmes, as "the one fixed point in a changing age". Has any country ever had a more potent symbol of continuity? Perhaps we will only properly appreciate this when Elizabeth II's reign comes to an end. **H**



Tom Holland is a historian, broadcaster and writer. His latest book is *Dominion: The Making of the Western Mind* (Little, Brown, 2019)

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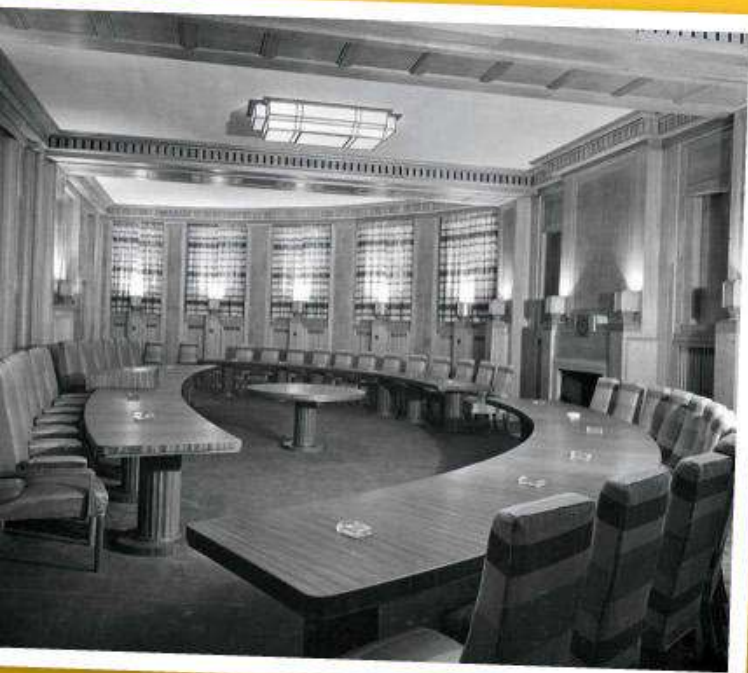


Moral character

The Queen meets members of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery at Windsor, October 2021. She embodies qualities that Britons still admire, says Tom Holland



A national institution



Grand surroundings

The control room (top) and one of the many art deco-inspired meeting rooms (below) at the BBC's new home at Broadcasting House. The building exuded luxury and authority, but not all members of staff were happy with the new look

// The corporation was expanding so quickly that even the luxurious Broadcasting House was too small from the beginning //

As it approached its second decade, the BBC's happy-go-lucky attitude was fading fast. And, as **DAVID HENDY** reveals in the second instalment of our 13-part series tracing the corporation's cultural impact, the government was now taking a keen interest

On Saturday 26 September 1931, less than a decade after its creation, the BBC began the eight-month-long task of packing its bags and moving from the cramped rabbit warren of Savoy Hill to a gleaming purpose-built headquarters building in Portland Place. When the first programmes were broadcast from this new home the following May, the occasion did not just mark a more comfortable working life for staff – it announced the BBC's arrival as a grand institution at the heart of the nation. The BBC had described Savoy Hill as the place where it had “spent its childhood and grew up to man's estate”. Now it had reached adulthood.

The building, north of Oxford Circus, was called Broadcasting House. Some 43,000 tonnes of London clay had been excavated to create three basement floors descending 12 metres below street level. Above ground were nine floors, 500 windows, balconies planted with bay trees, and a clock tower topped with a vast turtle-back roof. The edifice consisted of 2,630,000 blocks of shimmering white stone arranged in the gently curved shape of an ocean liner.

Inside, a state-of-the-art “sound factory” had been created. Twenty-two studios, numerous cloakrooms, green rooms and a large concert hall, each decorated with art deco flourishes and equipped with the latest radio technology, were stacked in a central tower insulated from exterior noise by a 1.2-metre-thick wall and hundreds of offices around the building's outer edges. The entrance hall, reached through an imposing set of bronze front doors, was clad in cool marble, creating an aura of

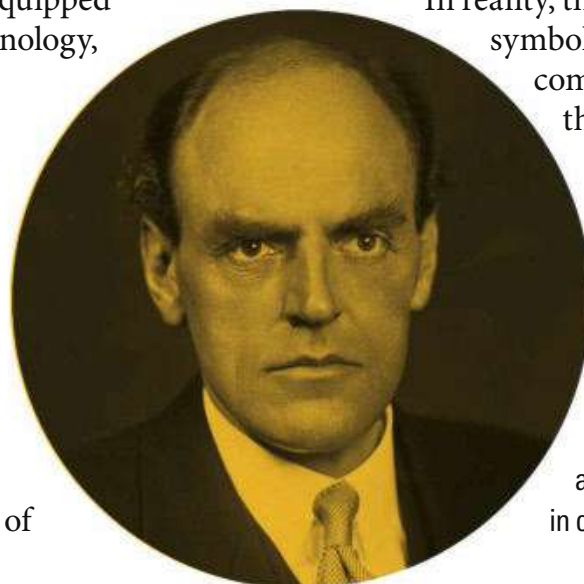
sophisticated modernity. The BBC's new home, proclaimed the *Daily Express*, was nothing less than the “brain centre of modern civilisation”.

This was a moment for excitement mixed with a growing sense of responsibility, yet there were grumbles from staff – and not just because the corporation was expanding so quickly that even the luxurious Broadcasting House was found to be too small from the beginning. The problem was that the place had an unfamiliar air of stately authority. Every door handle, tap and washbasin was polished daily. A newly designed BBC coat of arms occupied prominent positions around the building. The commissionaires on duty in the entrance hall would stand briskly to attention when the director-general, John Reith, or one of his senior deputies arrived each morning.

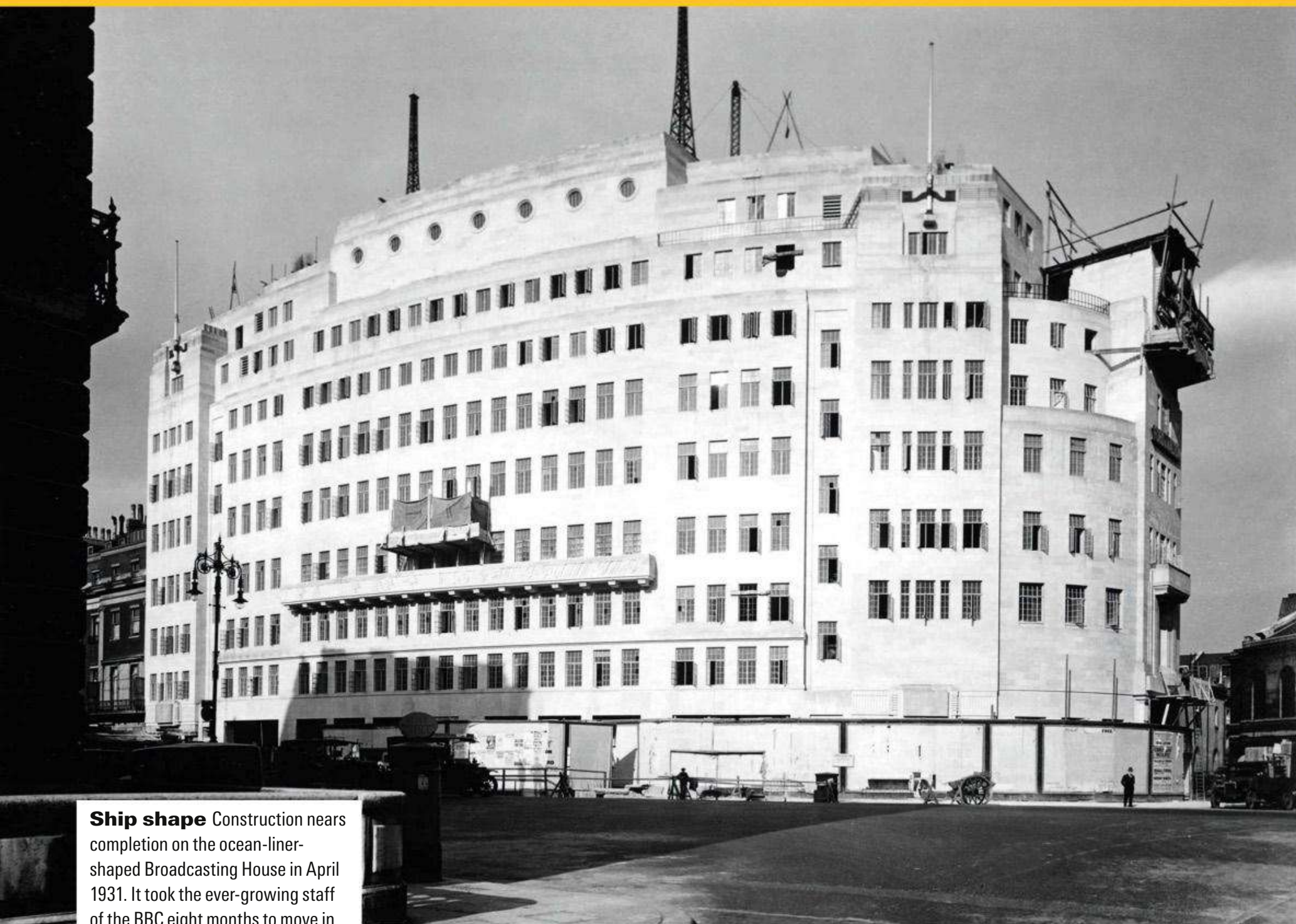
There were separate lifts for production staff, artistes and administrators. And the number of planners and accountants seemed to have multiplied overnight. Maurice Gorham, art editor of the *Radio Times*, wrote of a growing “caste feeling” of separation between those toiling away on the factory floor and a “management” that seemed increasingly detached from the creative process. Broadcasting House, he decided, was simply too “stuck-up for its own good”.

Voracious growth

In reality, the move was merely one symbol of a deeper and more complex evolution. There was the sheer growth in output to consider. By May 1932, there were two main networks: the National



Sir John Reith, who became the first director-general of the BBC in 1927, complained about government interference in coverage of the General Strike



Ship shape Construction nears completion on the ocean-liner-shaped Broadcasting House in April 1931. It took the ever-growing staff of the BBC eight months to move in

Programme and the Regional Programme, each usually on air from about 10am to around midnight. The Regional Programme, as its name suggests, offered a range of “opt-outs” and “opt-ins” in different parts of the country. There were national stations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland too, and the BBC had even started experimental television transmissions.

Feeding this voracious, ever-expanding schedule required not only more production staff, but more engineers, more clerical staff, more facilities and more paperwork – in short, more bureaucracy. The creative process, joyously ad hoc in the early days at Savoy Hill, had become more practised, professional, regulated and routine.

While all this was going on, the BBC had been moving steadily closer to the institutions of the British ruling elite – the worlds of Westminster and Whitehall, of Lambeth Palace and Sandringham. One straw in the wind had been the BBC’s awkward role during the General Strike of May 1926. With the national press suddenly shut down, the BBC had lashed together a news team of its own for the first time, and made a half-

decent attempt to reflect both sides in the dispute. But the threat by the chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill, to seize control of Savoy Hill and turn it into a partisan mouthpiece of the government had undoubtedly concentrated minds. It was behind-the-scenes pressure from Downing Street that forced the BBC to deny airtime at crucial moments to Labour leader Ramsay MacDonald and the archbishop of Canterbury, despite having allowed prime minister Stanley Baldwin to take to the microphone.

Once the strike was over, John Reith complained volubly about the BBC having been “interfered with”. But he recognised that self-censorship – in effect, being “for” the government in its news coverage, on the basis that the government was on this occasion “for” the nation – was what saved the BBC from being commandeered outright. For him, that was a price worth paying.

The General Strike blurred professional boundaries between broadcaster and officialdom. Nearly two weeks of co-ordination between the Savoy Hill newsroom and the Admiralty Office in Whitehall, where the government’s news operation was based,

had seen BBC staff working alongside senior civil servants to draft announcements and vet agency copy. It was a temporary arrangement, but one that Reith’s director of publicity described as a “pleasant association” he wished to see “perpetuated”.

Occasions to bind a nation

There was more going on here than the BBC cosyng up with politicians and civil servants. By the early 1930s, the BBC was regularly treating listeners to an annual round of programmes that eavesdropped on the great occasions of respectable civic life: Trooping the Colour, the Lord Mayor’s Banquet, Royal Ascot, the Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race, and the National Eisteddfod, for example. On 15 May 1932 – the very day that Broadcasting House officially opened for business – London listeners heard a British Legion memorial parade relayed from Portsmouth, evensong from a Somerset parish church, and a short talk from Viscount Elibank. The following day, the Prince of Wales unveiled the Somme memorial at Thiepval. Later that year, there was the first-ever Christmas Day royal broadcast, when a nervous George V

sat at his desk in Sandringham to deliver a message to Britain and the empire.

The technical skills involved in pulling off these occasions were remarkable. Yet it was hard to resist the impression that the BBC's growing status – and growing centrality to national life – involved a growing obsession with its own, somewhat overblown sense of dignity, along with a preponderance on air of somewhat orthodox middle-class values.

True, there was a concerted effort to accommodate popular taste in the schedule. Listeners could enjoy Gracie Fields in the hit series *Music Hall*; there was plenty of dance music, football and boxing, plus the occasional documentary about steel workers or coal miners. But it was clear that Broadcasting House would be a different place to Savoy Hill, and that the BBC of the 1930s would be different from the BBC of 1922. That happy-go-lucky working culture of the early days was gone forever, it seemed, and the pioneers now muttered darkly of “conservative forces” taking control. As it had grown into adulthood, the corporation had also grown into a thoroughly respectable part of the British establishment. **H**

David Hendy is emeritus professor at the University of Sussex. His latest book is *The BBC: A People's History* (Profile, 2022)

LISTEN

Greg Jenner is diving into the BBC's archive for the new Radio 4 series **Past Forward**. Catch up at: bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0013256



Global transmission
A power switchboard at the Daventry transmitting station, from which the BBC began its short-wave Empire Service broadcasts in 1932

IN FOCUS How the BBC's Empire Service provided “a girdle around the Earth”

Only months after decamping to the grandeur of Broadcasting House, the BBC celebrated another momentous step in its rise to international status. On Monday 19 December 1932, the Empire Service (now the World Service) was born, hurling its signal across thousands of miles and in all directions from the powerful new Daventry transmitter. This new service was an opportunity to keep Britons in what the BBC called “the back of beyond” in touch with their homeland – and for the homeland, in turn, to “diffuse its ideas and culture” to other parts of the globe.

But this was not the first occasion on which the dominions and colonies had been linked to the imperial capital by what the *Radio Times* called “a girdle around the Earth”: trial short-wave broadcasts to Australia had taken place as early as 1927. There had also been “Empire Day”, an annual event of unbridled jingoism in towns and villages across the country, characterised by speeches, singing and saluting the flag,

with schoolchildren, especially, encouraged to celebrate the unquestioned virtues of British colonialism. Not wishing to be left out, the BBC took the chance to broadcast to home listeners an increasingly elaborate parade of thanksgiving services, traditional songs from around the world, and popular tunes that had “played their part in building and consolidating the empire”.

International link-ups grew into a prominent feature of the BBC's Christmas Day programming too. In December 1938, with the threat of war hanging over Europe, listeners were sonically whisked around various capitals, from Stockholm to Prague, as they were treated to ancient carols from isolated churches, the swirling sounds of a fairground in Berlin's Lustgarten and the chatter of a Greek cafe, cheek by jowl with descriptions of family festivities from a Swedish housewife, a German toymaker and a Czech schoolgirl. The emphasis on the voices of “ordinary men, women and children” was striking – and a welcome reminder that the BBC had not entirely lost its common touch.



Seat at the top table

David Lloyd George (left) at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in 1935. The BBC was now offering viewers a ringside seat at the great occasions of respectable civic life

“ The emphasis on ‘ordinary’ voices was a reminder that the BBC had not entirely lost its common touch ”

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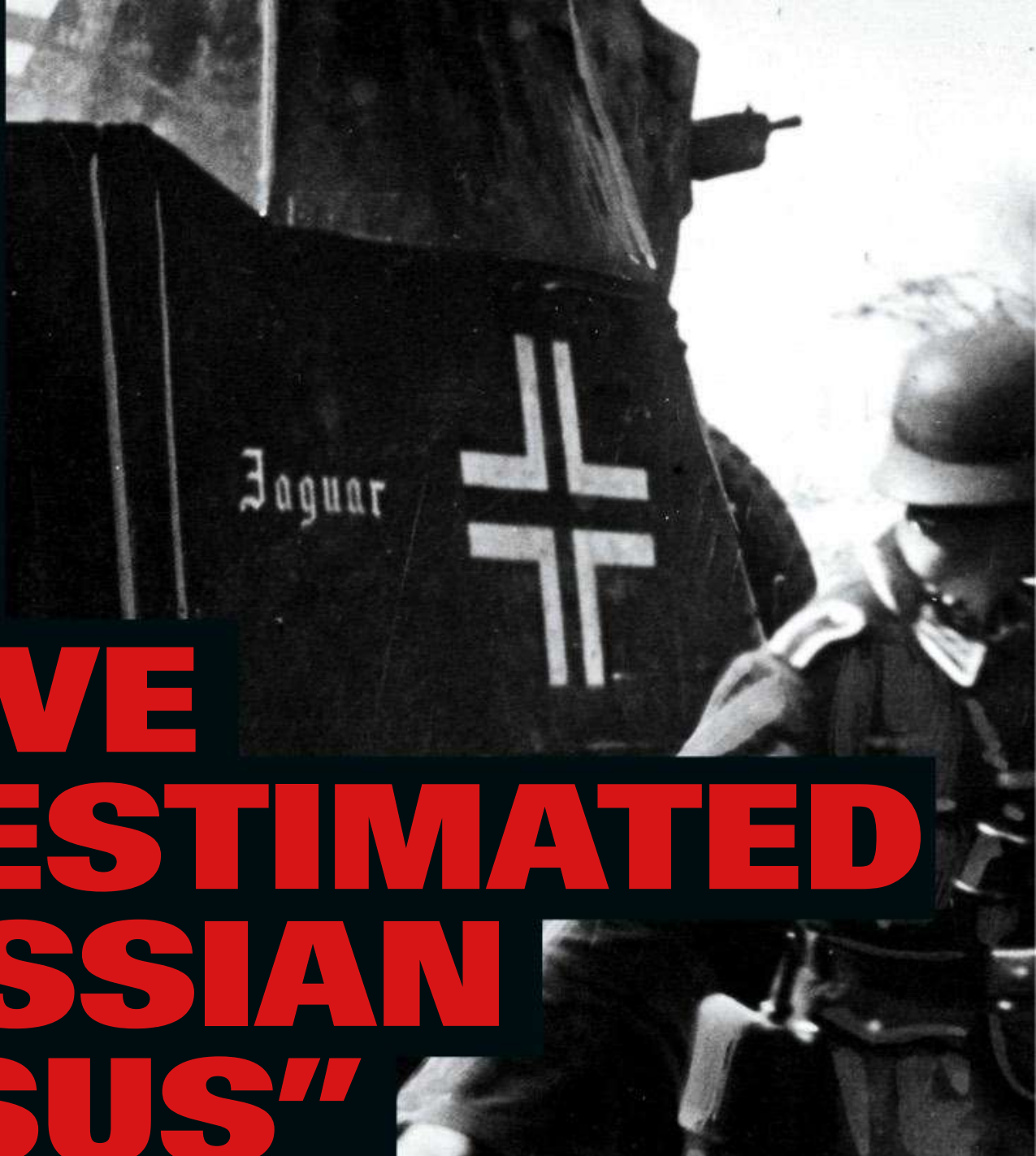
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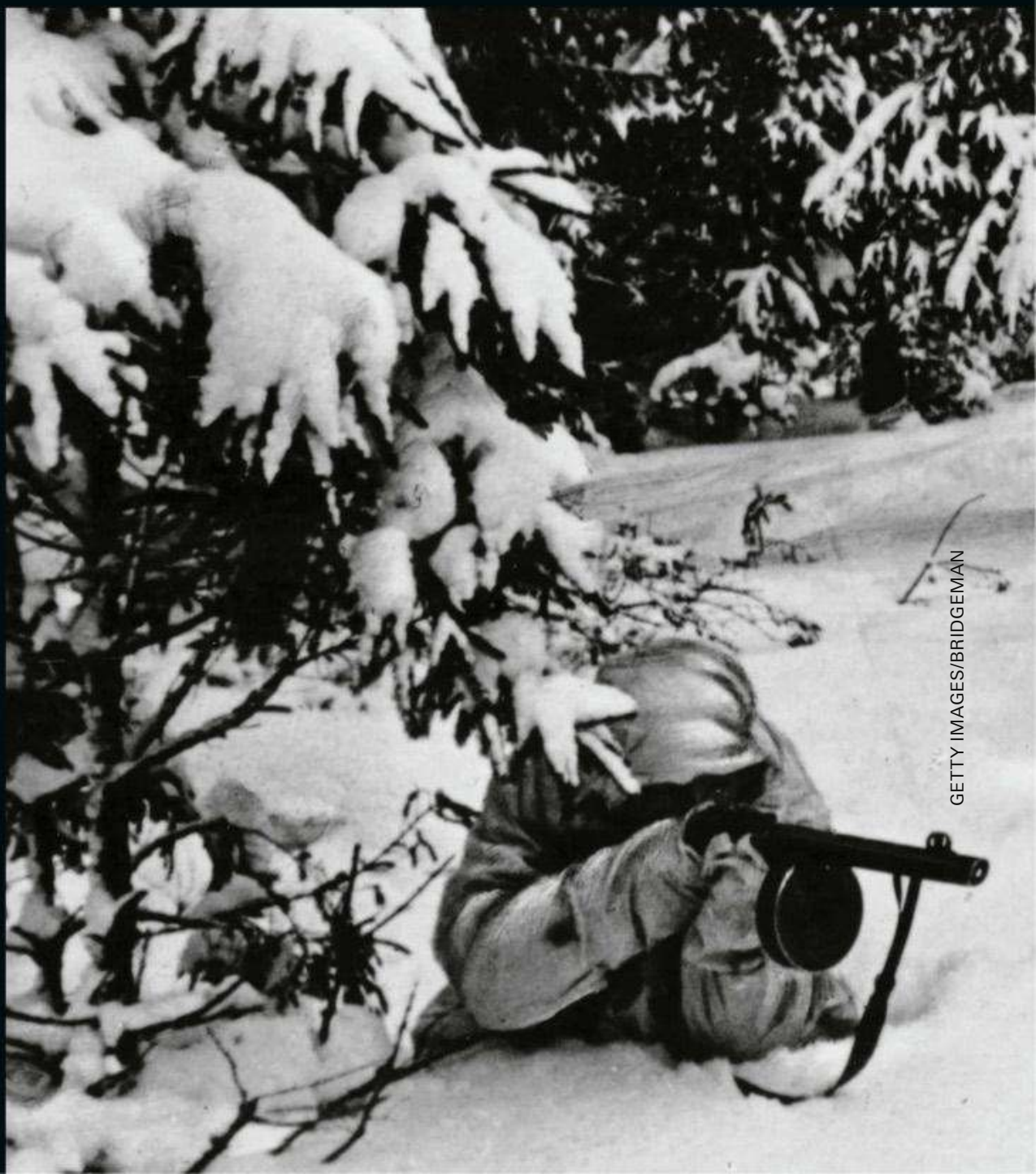
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"WE HAVE UNDERESTIMATED THE RUSSIAN COLOSSUS"

When Hitler unleashed the invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, he fully expected his armies to triumph in a matter of weeks. Instead, the operation cost him the war. **Richard J Evans** considers how it all went wrong for the Germans on the eastern front



GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN



Rapid advances

German soldiers watch a farmhouse they have burned during the invasion of the Soviet Union, 1941. Sweeping gains in the early stages of Operation Barbarossa pointed to a swift German victory



Cold comfort

Soviet soldiers in the snow. While the Red Army provided its men with winter camouflage uniforms, many German troops froze to death in apparel designed for summer combat

The eastern front

On 22 June 1941 Germany and its allies launched the biggest land invasion in history. After an artillery barrage had opened up along a thousand-mile front, 3 million German troops, along with half a million more from Romania and other allied countries, poured across the border with the Soviet Union in an attack spearheaded by 3,600 tanks and assisted by more than half a million motor vehicles. Over a thousand combat aircraft bombarded Soviet military positions and airfields from above.

Within a few weeks, the Red Army had been driven back hundreds of miles. Its armies were encircled, its tanks and equipment destroyed, and more than half a million of its men captured. Panic and chaos reigned in the Soviet armed forces as communications broke down, generals did not know what to do, and head-on confrontations with the invaders only led to huge loss of life. On 3 July 1941, Franz Halder, chief of the German Army general staff, wrote ecstatically in his diary: "It's really not saying too much if I claim that the campaign against Russia has been won in 14 days."

Operation Barbarossa, named after a celebrated medieval German emperor, had been planned and prepared for almost a year – ever since it had begun to become clear to Hitler that his intention to invade and crush the United Kingdom was going to be difficult to put into effect. As Hitler told his generals on 31 July 1940, the defeat of the Soviet Union would mean "the end of any hopes that might move England still to hope for a change in the situation". The British would realise that there would be "no purpose for them carrying on the war when Russia has been beaten and eliminated from it".

The quest for space

But the roots of Operation Barbarossa went back much further than this. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler's lengthy memoir and political tract published in the mid-1920s, the one consistent ideological theme that stands out besides extreme German nationalism and fanatical anti-Semitism is the claim that Germany needed *Lebensraum*, or "living-space". Germany had lost the First World War not least, Hitler thought, because the home front had collapsed under the strain of malnutrition and associated diseases that had killed more than half a million civilians, brought on, above all, by an effective Allied blockade.

From the very beginning, Hitler was determined to avoid this situation in the next war he so fervently desired. "Living-space" therefore meant for him the conquest of



Best of enemies A cartoon printed in the wake of the 1939 Nazi-Soviet pact shows Hitler and the Russian bear wrestling over Ukraine. Both sides signed the pact to buy time to build up their armies

Ukraine and other parts of eastern Europe in order to secure its food supplies for Germany and the Germans.

Such a conquest would, Hitler believed, be easy because the Slavs who lived in the region were sub-humans, dull-witted and without fighting spirit. According to him, they were led by a clique of Jewish Bolsheviks who were exploiting them for their own nefarious purposes. "The Russians are inferior," he told his generals on 5 December 1940. "The army is leaderless." Once the invasion was under way, the whole edifice of the Soviet Union would soon collapse. It would only take four or five months. The French, whom Hitler regarded as racially far superior to the Slavs, had after all been defeated in a short space of time. So it would be also with the Soviets.

As it turned out, of course, all of this was fantasy, the product of Hitler's racial beliefs. The Soviet Union was not led by a Jewish clique; indeed, Stalin himself was filled with anti-Semitic prejudice, as would become clear in the purges he launched after the war.

Stalling tactics

On 23 August 1939, to almost everyone's surprise, and to the disgust of many ordinary members of both the Nazi and the Communist parties, the German and Soviet foreign ministers signed what became known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact. For both Hitler and Stalin the main benefit was that it bought time – time in which they could build up their armed forces to a point where they were ready to deploy.

Hitler's generals were so worried in 1938–39 that he would force them to go to war unprepared that a number of them considered arresting the Nazi leader to get him out of the way. Halder even carried a loaded pistol with him for a time in the late autumn of 1939, though the plot fell apart when the leaders began to fear that Hitler had got wind of it.

For his part, Stalin realised that the brutal purges he had carried out in the mid-to-late thirties – which had eliminated everyone from senior army officers and arms factory managers to thousands of key industrial personnel – had seriously weakened the Soviet Union's military potential. And in any case, the forced industrialisation he was pushing through had only been in progress for a short time. Driven by paranoid fear of an international capitalist conspiracy, Stalin secured a number of secret clauses in the pact that gave him control over border regions and assigned Finland to the Soviet sphere of influence. But he also agreed to send extensive quantities of raw materials and essential supplies to Germany, ironically helping to speed up the country's ongoing rearmament programme.

The conquest of the east would be easy because the Slavs were, in Hitler's eyes, sub-human and dull-witted



Border control German commanders near the Soviet border on 22 June 1941, the opening day of Operation Barbarossa. Hitler had long coveted Soviet territory in order to secure “living-space” for the German people



Bad tidings Moscow residents listen to a radio report announcing the German invasion of the Soviet Union, June 1941. The crucial battle for the city would take place just a few months later

FROM THE JAWS OF DEFEAT

How Soviet forces turned the tide on the eastern front

23 August 1939 The German and Soviet foreign ministers **sign the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact**, later known as the Nazi-Soviet Pact. This non-aggression agreement gives Hitler and Stalin time to expand their armies ahead of a likely conflict between the two nations.

22 June 1941 Germany and its allies launch **Operation Barbarossa**, the largest land invasion in history. Some 3.5 million Axis troops, 3,600 tanks and more than a thousand combat aircraft enter the Soviet Union. **They shatter the Soviet defences** and quickly make huge gains.

August 1941 Hitler sends some of his armies **south-east in search of much-needed resources**. They occupy Ukraine and then move to the Caucasus, hoping to use Soviet oilfields to top up German supplies. Their subsequent redeployment to the Moscow front is interrupted by heavy autumn rains.

2 October 1941 **Operation Typhoon** begins, which sees German troops **attempt to capture Moscow**. Soviet forces unleash a stream of attacks on troops fighting through the freezing winter in summer clothes. The Germans fail to capture the city and retreat by mid-December.

December 1941 Displeased with the retreat from Moscow, **Hitler dismisses Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch**, commander-in-chief of the German army, and assumes the role himself.

Summer 1942 Hitler splits his forces once more, sending some south to the Caucasus to reach the oilfields, and others to Stalingrad (now Volgograd). **In doing so, he places immense strain on already stretched supply lines.**

23 August 1942 German forces begin their **attack on Stalingrad**. Intense street fighting stretches on for months, until a massive Soviet counter-offensive in November overwhelms the enemy. On 31 January 1943, newly promoted **Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus** surrenders.

5 July 1943 German and Soviet armies **face off at the Kursk salient in the biggest tank battle in history**. The Nazis are defeated on 23 August and withdraw all along the line. This retreat continues until the end of the war, in May 1945.



Cruel captivity

Soviet prisoners captured by the Germans after the battle of Kiev, 1941. Hitler told his generals that Soviet PoWs should be allowed to perish, and that was the fate of 3.3 million of them



Errors of judgment

Franz Halder (right), chief of the German army general staff, with Adolf Hitler and Walther von Brauchitsch, December 1941. Soviet resistance shocked Halder out of his initial complacency



Taking the lead Stalin was prepared to give commanders such as Timoshenko (left) and Zhukov (right) their head – and they repaid his faith

Stalin simply couldn't accept the possibility that the Germans would launch an invasion in 1941. So confident was he that the two nations would remain at peace for at least another year that when an ex-Communist German soldier crossed the front line into Soviet territory to warn that an attack was imminent, Stalin had him shot.

Unpreparedness helps explain the near collapse of the Red Army in the early weeks of Operation Barbarossa. The ideological nature of the war on the German side also explains the murderous brutality with which it was conducted. "This is a war of annihilation," Hitler told his generals on 30 March 1941, prior to the invasion. Political commissars in the Red Army were to be shot, Jews were to be eliminated, and prisoners of war were to be allowed to perish. Captured Red Army soldiers were penned into enclosures on the open steppe and left to die, until the Germans began to realise their potential as forced labourers. Altogether, 3.3 million Soviet troops died after being captured by the Germans.

In the longer term, the "General Plan for the East", first mooted in July 1941, envisaged up to 85 per cent of Poles, 75 per cent of Belarusians, and 64 per cent of Ukrainians perishing in a similar way, to be replaced by German farmers producing foodstuffs for the Reich on an industrial scale.

By the late summer of 1941, the genocide of the Jews was under way too, targeting the entire Jewish population of Europe in a campaign that encompassed men, women and children and resulted in the murder of 6 million people. They died from being shot into pits and were murdered in the gas



Death and destruction Buildings burn during the battle of Kiev, August–September 1941. Hitler's decision to divide his forces, sending some of his armies to the Ukrainian capital, would prove a costly one

chambers of Auschwitz, Treblinka and other death camps, as well as through malnutrition and disease. While Slavs were killed as mere obstacles to the German reordering of eastern Europe, the Jews were treated with extreme sadism and violence as the supposed vectors of a worldwide conspiracy to destroy Germany, the objects of paranoid fear as well as unbridled hatred on the part of the Nazis.

A gnawing anxiety

The racist imperatives behind the war on the eastern front help explain why Operation Barbarossa soon ran into difficulties. Within a few weeks the overweening confidence of generals like Franz Halder was being replaced by a gnawing, uncomprehending anxiety about the continued resistance of the Red

Army, who were expected to give up quickly. "We have underestimated the Russian colossus," confessed Halder on 2 August.

While the Soviets drew on vast reserves to replenish their losses, mounting German losses, though fewer, were much harder to make good. The rapid advance across the vast spaces of the steppe soon left supply lines overstretched, a situation made more difficult by the thinly distributed railway network and the lack of metalled roads.

Stalin meanwhile had rallied round and broadcast to the nation, proclaiming that the war was a great patriotic struggle – a view strengthened for most of the Soviet Union's population by the untrammelled violence meted out to civilians as well as soldiers by the invading enemy. He began to give more initiative to his commanders, notably Georgy Zhukov, who turned out to be something of a military genius.

Soviet industry had been relocated out of Germany's reach, east of the Ural Mountains, and ramped up production with astonishing rapidity. Material help from the western Allies further boosted the Soviet arms industry. The Japanese focus on the Pacific, soon to materialise in the attack on Pearl Harbor, freed up large quantities of Red Army reserves to be transferred west to the European theatre.

Still convinced of Slavic inferiority and the inevitability of victory, Hitler made the fateful decision to divide his forces. He diverted some of his armies to Kiev, leading to the occupation of Ukraine in October 1941. These were some of the most stunning German victories of the war. But they were to carry a heavy price.

Stalin declared the war a great patriotic struggle – a view supported by German violence against civilians

The eastern front

Meanwhile, with the autumn came the rains, and the German army's advance towards Moscow got bogged down in the mud. Only in November was the ground firm enough to resume the forward march.

Following the victory in Kiev and the seizure of other key Ukrainian towns, Hitler transferred troops and resources back to the Moscow front, but the delay had been fatal. Soon the bitter Russian winter set in, while the German armies, confident of a quick victory, were still in summer clothes. Already depleted and exhausted after months of continual marching, they began to freeze to death. Zhukov's forces started to harass them, launching attack after attack with troops in warm, white-camouflaged winter uniforms. Operation Barbarossa ground to a halt.

After the war, the surviving generals blamed Hitler for this debacle, and it is true that his hubris had played a major role in the failure of Barbarossa. But they had fully shared in his views at the time. Schooled in Prussian military doctrines of attack, they had no idea what to do next. They still viewed Hitler as a military genius, his reputation created by the swiftness of the defeat of France in 1940. But all he could do was to underline "the fanatical will to defend the ground on which the troops are standing".

Tactical withdrawal for him was merely proof of cowardice. When Field Marshal von Rundstedt sanctioned such a redeployment, Hitler fired him. Field Marshal Ritter von Leeb suffered the same fate, as did the tank generals Heinz Guderian and Erich Hoepner. All had sanctioned tactical withdrawals.

Others crumbled under the strain. Field Marshal von Reichenau died from a heart attack, and Field Marshal von Bock was relieved of his command. Rundstedt also had a heart attack, though he survived. The army commander-in-chief, Walther von Brauchitsch, had a heart attack as well, in mid-November. Hitler dispensed with his services and took over command of the army himself. The move was greeted with relief by generals and troops alike. Now something would be done.

The quest for oil

The defeat before Moscow was not decisive, and Hitler remained optimistic about his chances of victory. When campaigning resumed after the spring thaw he split his forces, redeploying some of them south into the Caucasus, aiming for the oilfields of the Caspian region, while the other units converged on the Volga city of Stalingrad.

For much of the year the Red Army wasted thousands of lives in a series of futile frontal assaults. But it learned its lesson, and by the late summer had become better at



Icy grip German troops struggle through the depths of a Soviet winter. Exhausted and depleted, the invaders proved increasingly easy pickings for a resurgent Red Army



The eastern front



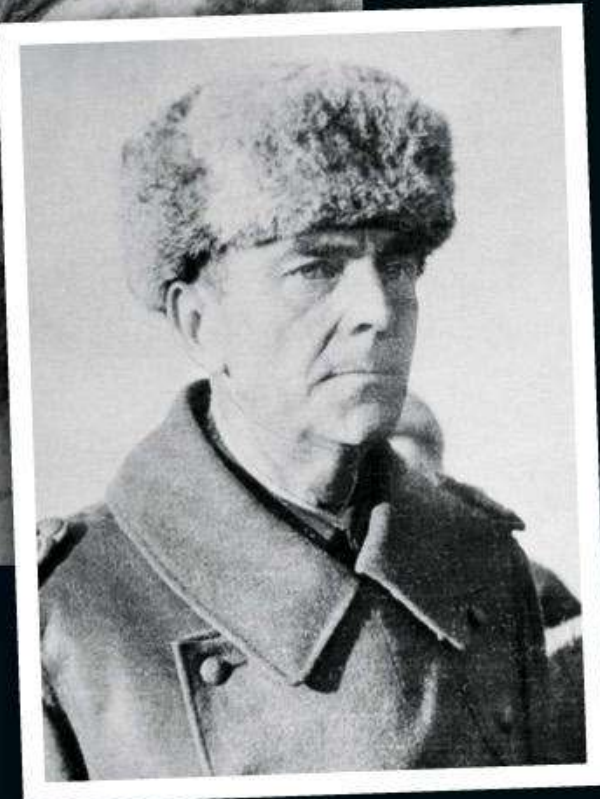
Mountain pass German troops in the Caucasus, 1942. They had been dispatched south towards the oilfields of the Caspian region in a bid to sate the Wehrmacht's desperate need for supplies of fuel

Fire power Men at work at a weapons factory in the Urals, 1942. The Soviet Union scaled up its industrial capacity with astonishing speed



Winter warriors Soviet troops – including the celebrated sniper Vasily Zaitsev (left) – at Stalingrad. Victory here sent the Germans into a retreat that they were never able to reverse

Resigned to defeat General Friedrich Paulus at the surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad. Hitler regarded the capitulation as an act of abject cowardice



GETTY IMAGES



Red juggernaut Soviet troops on the move at Kursk. The Red Army's numerical superiority proved decisive in this huge clash in the summer of 1943, setting the template for the battles ahead

coordinating armour, infantry and air support while avoiding costly confrontations with the enemy. And by splitting his forces, Hitler had fatally weakened them. In September, as Halder reminded him that he was underestimating the strength of the Red Army, the dictator lost his patience and fired him.

Uncontrollable rage

Increasingly contemptuous of the orthodox and mostly aristocratic Prussian generals, Hitler appointed Friedrich Paulus, a staff officer without battle experience but coming from a relatively humble background, to lead the Sixth Army in an assault on Stalingrad, which he thought had an enormous symbolic significance because of its name.

As the German forces entered the city to begin a bitter war of attrition on its shattered streets, Zhukov, with Stalin's approval, brought in more than a million fresh troops and large numbers of tanks to break through Paulus's lines in the rear, where they were manned by weak Romanian troops, in a vast encircling movement that cut off the Sixth Army from its supply lines.

Hitler overruled the generals, including Paulus, who advised retreat. As the Red Army pressed forward, the German soldiers began to starve. The vainglorious boast of Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, that he could keep them supplied, turned out to be empty. On 30 January 1943 Hitler promoted Paulus to field marshal, hinting he should kill himself rather than surrender. But surrender he did, along with the remnants of his troops.

Even more than Moscow, Stalingrad was a major turning-point in the war. From this

moment onwards, the German armies on the eastern front were in steady retreat, beginning with their withdrawal from the Caucasus in order to escape being cut off by Red Army forces. Josef Goebbels launched a huge propaganda campaign presenting the defeat as a noble act of self-sacrifice, though Hitler himself railed against what he saw as Paulus's cowardice and lack of will. Popular morale plummeted.

Few heeded Goebbels' exhortation to wage "total war" and make further sacrifices in the cause of victory; most thought it was impossible to tighten their belts further anyway. Hitler himself kept up the façade of optimism, but privately he began to harbour

doubts about ultimate victory. His health, already affected by the stress of Moscow, now deteriorated still further; Goebbels and others reported that he was ageing fast, he suffered from insomnia, and was more prone than ever to outbursts of uncontrollable rage.

Ultimately there was no way of stopping the Soviet juggernaut. In the summer of 1943, as the Red Army pressed forward, Hitler saw an opportunity to cut off large numbers of troops at the Kursk salient, resulting in yet another gargantuan confrontation, with more than 4 million troops assembled by the Soviets, who had prior warning of the attempt. They outnumbered the German forces by more than three to one, and although the Red Army lost nearly 2,000 tanks to the Germans' 252, their numerical superiority was decisive. The German generals, against Hitler's repeated objections, were forced to withdraw all along the line. It was a retreat that continued until the very end.

The eastern front was by some distance the most important theatre of war in Europe: from the moment it began, on 22 June 1941, to the end of the war, in May 1945, there was no point at which it absorbed less than two-thirds of the German armed forces. Hitler once said that everything he did was aimed against Russia. Ultimately, that obsession cost him the war. **H**

Following Stalingrad, Hitler suffered from insomnia and was more prone than ever to outbursts of rage

Sir Richard J Evans is regius professor emeritus of history at Cambridge University. He is one of the contributors appearing in the second season of *The Rise of the Nazis*, which is coming soon to BBC Two



Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

Who was history's most notorious pirate?

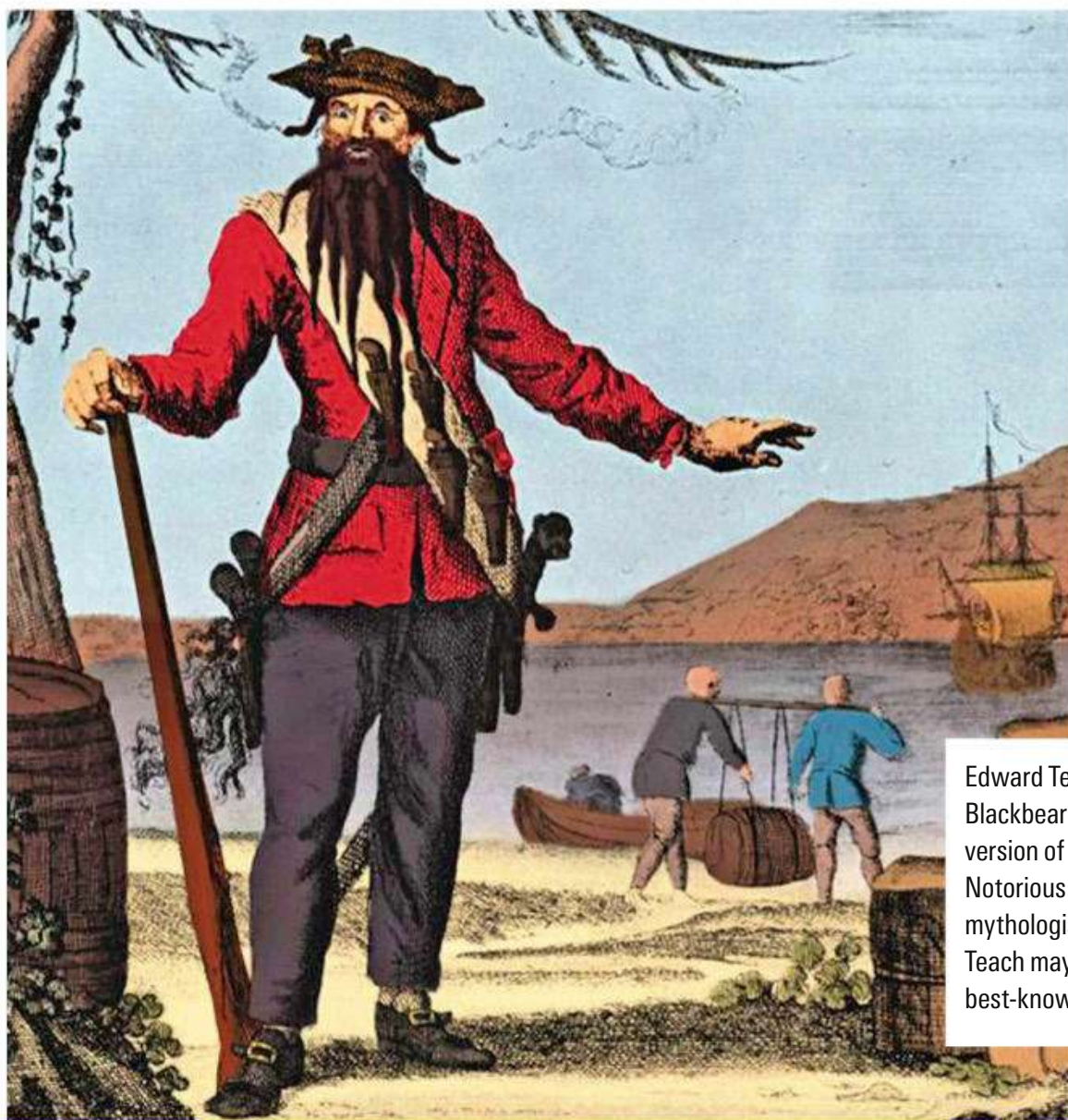
➤➤➤ It must surely be Edward Teach, who terrorised the seas of the British Atlantic world from 1716-18, towards the end of the so-called “Golden Age of Piracy”. He killed fewer people than other pirates, captured only one major ship, and did not plunder enough goods to make himself very wealthy – yet by the time he died he was practically a household name. How did a seemingly average pirate become one of the most notorious in history?

Teach became a celebrity thanks to his nickname: Blackbeard. In an era when it was fashionable for men to be clean-shaven, he grew his black hair into a long mane and cultivated a beard that stretched halfway down his chest. During battle he placed lit tapers in his hair to make it look as if he'd emerged from the depths of hell. This image enabled him to subdue his victims through fear rather than lethal violence.

Blackbeard's spectacular death etched his name into historic memory. On 22 November 1718, his ship was cornered off Ocracoke Island, North Carolina by British naval lieutenant Robert Maynard, who engaged the pirate captain in combat. “Well done, lad!” Blackbeard reputedly shouted, too injured to retaliate – before being decapitated. His head was then mounted on a ship's bowsprit to be displayed up and down the eastern seaboard of North America.

The dread buccaneer's final battle was discussed for decades, spawning a rich mythology. His skull was encased in silver and used as a drinking vessel, some said. Others claimed that Blackbeard had 14 wives and buried treasure. One thing we can be sure of, though, is that no other pirate could ever match his infamy.

.....
Rebecca Simon, historian of piracy



Edward Teach, known as Blackbeard, in a coloured version of a c1736 engraving. Notorious in life and mythologised after death, Teach may well be history's best-known pirate



A 1930s advertisement promotes the use of Tho-Radia radioactive “healthy lipstick” – part of a potentially hazardous beauty regime

What's the deadliest item that's ever been used as make-up?

➤➤➤ Make-up history is full of dangerous materials, including lead, mercury and arsenic, but the deadliest was potentially radium.

The discovery of radium in 1898 prompted a craze, with scientists, medical practitioners and entrepreneurs exploiting its exciting properties. Many of the resultant inventions aimed at the general consumer were grounded in the theory that exposure to radium in minute doses caused a small amount of stress. This would trigger a chain of physiological reactions that worked as a potent metabolic catalyst, resulting in a host of positive physical changes. Among the cosmetic products launched were Tho-Radia, Radior, Artes, Radium Vita and KemOLite radioactive beauty plasma.

Though we now know that radium can be incredibly dangerous, the high cost of the element meant that in most cases only minuscule amounts were used, limiting the harm caused. But consider the case of wealthy playboy Eben Byers, who took numerous doses of radium-laced Radithor “medicine” – till his jaw disintegrated and he suffered a gruesome death.

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Lucy Jane Santos, author of *Half Lives: The Unlikely History of Radium* (Icon Books, 2020)



A Japanese warrior in armour, c1865–67. Within a few years of this picture being taken, the modernising Meiji government swept away the samurai system

Why was the samurai class abolished?

»»» When the last samurai regime, the Tokugawa shogunate, was toppled in 1868, the newly formed Meiji government that replaced it faced an expensive and entrenched human resource problem. Over the previous 265 years, samurai (the dominant warrior class) had monopolised all military and bureaucratic positions in the roughly 270 or so semi-autonomous domains ruled by hereditary warlords, and in the shogun's capital, Edo (Tokyo).

The Meiji oligarchs, most of them young samurai, decided that the system of hereditary warrior rule was holding Japan back, and set out to create a centralised government modelled on western examples. The government thus abolished the domains, created prefectures run by civilian governors, and took on the costs of paying the newly unemployed samurai. Between one-third and nearly half of the government's income was spent on paying samurai salaries. During the first half of the 1870s, those

salaries were turned into taxed stipends and then into public bonds.

In those years, the oligarchs also opened government service to commoners – albeit elite ones – and created a conscript military. Meanwhile, they eliminated samurai privileges that were deemed too backwards, such as having a shaved head with a topknot, and carrying swords in public.

Most samurai did not resist these changes – some were even relieved to be free to pursue any occupation they desired – but a violent minority rebelled. Those insurrections culminated in the so-called “rebellion of the south-west” in 1877, the largest, and last, showdown between the Meiji government and ex-samurai – a story loosely retold in the 2003 film *The Last Samurai*.

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Michael Wert, associate professor of east Asian history at Marquette University, and author of *Samurai: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2021)

DID YOU KNOW...?

A novel business

Before he found fame as the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe established a farm for civets in Stoke Newington (now in north London), extracting a “buttery oil” from their anal glands that was used in the making of perfume. The venture was thwarted when one of his many creditors seized the animals in lieu of his debts. Defoe engaged in a number of money-making schemes before finding success as a writer, of which the civet farm was the most unlikely.



Writer (and unsuccessful civet farmer) Daniel Defoe

Victoria takes a hit

In 1850, a former army lieutenant hit Queen Victoria over the head with his walking stick. Robert Pate, who was experiencing poor mental health, was in Piccadilly when he saw the queen's carriage emerging from the courtyard of Cambridge House. He strolled up to the vehicle and struck the monarch, crushing her bonnet and drawing blood. Immediately arrested, he was later tried and sent to the penal colony in Tasmania. Victoria bore a scar on her forehead for the next decade.

A present from the past

During the First World War, a wealthy barrister, Cecil Chubb, bought Stonehenge – reportedly as a present for his wife. The previous owner of the land on which the ancient monument stood put it up for auction on 21 September 1915, and Chubb – “on a whim”, he said – paid £6,600 for it. According to some sources, his wife had wanted a set of curtains or chairs from the

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auction – and was not best pleased to instead receive a ring of standing stones. **H**

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Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history





They came, they saw,

To fight or capitulate. That was the choice facing the people of Britain when the Romans invaded in AD 43. Or was it?

Miles Russell tells the story of a tribe that adopted an alternative strategy: to treat the legions with utter indifference



Accompanies
the BBC Radio 3
Essay series on the
Iron Age, **Unearthing
Britannia's Tribes**

BBC
RADIO
3

Unequal fight
FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: A bust of
Emperor Claudius, who ordered
the invasion of Britain in AD 43;
British tribes were no match for
Rome's professional troops,
shown being carried in a warship;
Roundhouses in the Iron Age
enclosure at Butser Ancient Farm
in Hampshire. Most Britons in the
first century AD lived in small,
scattered settlements

they were
IGNORED

Roman invasion of Britain



In the heights

The Durotriges tribal land was home to some of Britain's largest hill forts, including (clockwise from top left): Hambledon Hill, Maiden Castle, Hod Hill and Badbury Rings. It's now believed that the tribe had abandoned Maiden Castle and Hod Hill by the time the Romans arrived

In 1936, a group of archaeologists working at Maiden Castle, near Dorchester, made a grisly discovery. Scattered near the east gate of this ancient hillfort were at least 52 Iron Age skeletons, some with horrific injuries to the head, back and shoulders. For the excavation director, Mortimer Wheeler, the cause of these terrible injuries was clear. He interpreted the skeletons as part of a war cemetery, bodies lying “in tragic profusion, displaying the marks of battle”. To him, these were the men and women of the Durotriges tribe, who had, in the first century AD, vainly defended their hilltop home against advancing Roman troops.

“What happened here was plain to see,” Wheeler was later to write. The Roman infantry, under the covering fire of missiles, had “advanced up the slope, cutting its way from rampart to rampart, tower to tower” until they got into the area of the hillfort gateway. “Confusion and massacre dominated the scene,” he went on. “Men and women, young and old, were savagely cut down,

The skeletons of Maiden Castle hillfort were long believed to be the victims of a brutal Roman ground assault

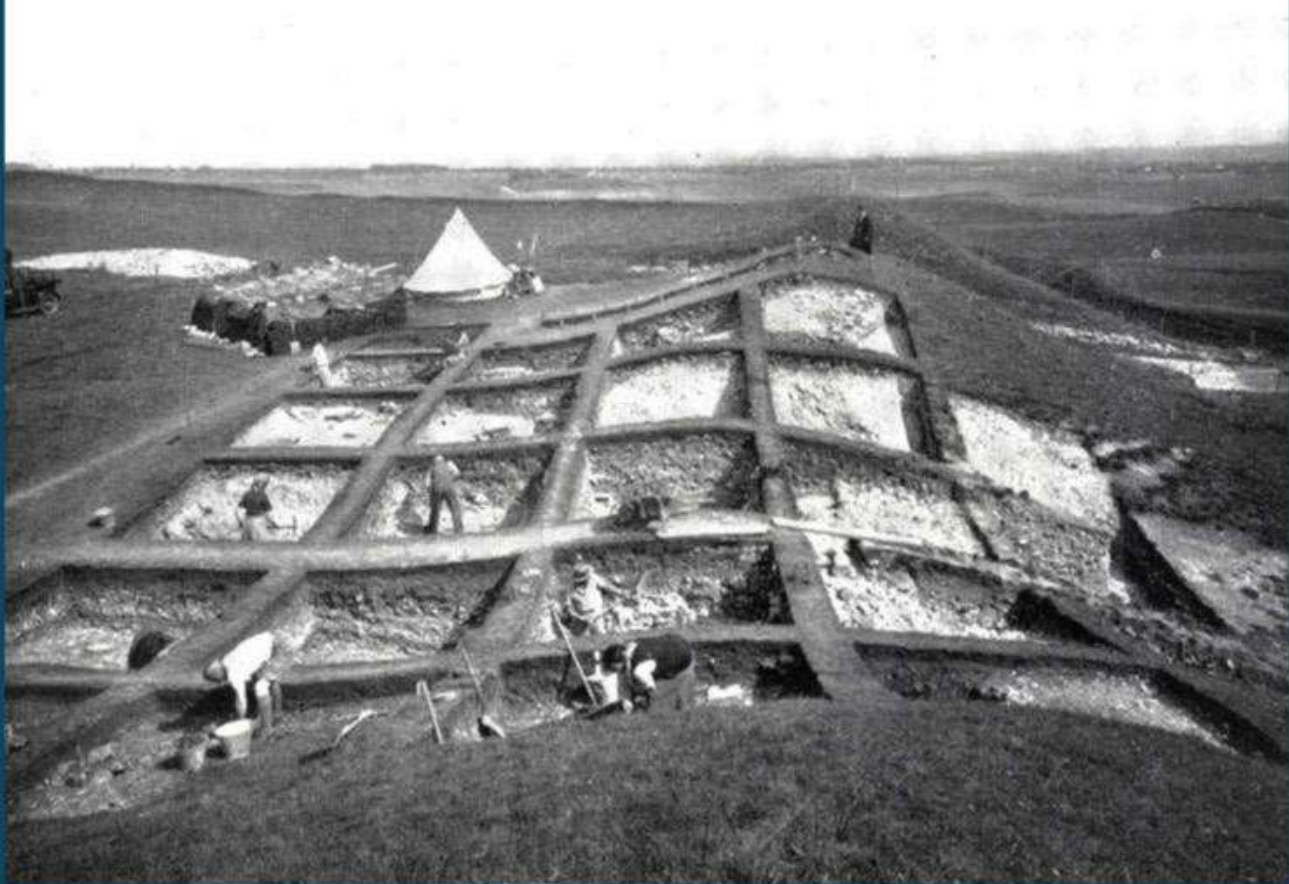
before the legionaries were called to heel and the work of systematic destruction began.”

It was a dramatic and evocative description of a battle fought 1,900 years earlier – and one that proved extraordinarily persuasive. Mortimer Wheeler’s “war cemetery” became a 1930s media sensation – one that, until recently, appeared in pretty much every account of Roman Britain. For much of the 80 years or so since Wheeler’s team entered Maiden Castle hillfort, the Durotriges have been credited with leading armed resistance to the armies of Rome, operating from a series of strongly fortified hillforts across what is now Dorset and southern Wiltshire. Their story has been presented as a bitterly contested struggle against what may have been the first professional army of the ancient world – one that ultimately saw their hillforts taken and their people killed or enslaved.

With positions such as keeper of the London Museum on his CV, Mortimer Wheeler was one of the most respected archaeologists of his generation. But recent

Chequered history

Archaeologists excavate Maiden Castle hillfort in 1936. What they discovered led them to believe that the fort had been a centre of British resistance to the Romans



A misreading

Mortimer Wheeler in 1956. His theories on what happened in southern Britain following the Roman invasion proved hugely influential



Violent death

At least 52 Iron Age skeletons were found at the Maiden Castle dig. It was long believed that some had died during a Roman attack on the hillfort



archaeological discoveries are suggesting that, when it came to the Durotriges, his conclusions may have been incorrect. These new finds are painting a very different picture of what happened within the confines of Maiden Castle hillfort almost two millennia ago. They suggest that the Durotriges didn't fight to the death against Rome's legions. Instead, it seems, they had a relaxed relationship with the invaders, almost to the point of complete indifference.

Good for business

The Durotriges weren't the first British tribe to encounter the Romans following their invasion of Britain in AD 43. When the Roman emperor Claudius ordered the assault, target number one for his legions was Camulodunum (Colchester), capital of the Trinovantes, then one of the more powerful tribes in southern Britain. Once Roman troops had eliminated all opposition, the emperor arrived to oversee the capture of Camulodunum where, as an inscription in

Rome was later to note, "he received the surrender of 11 British kings". Sadly, neither the names of these kings, nor the tribes they ruled over, was recorded.

Despite this lack of information, it's assumed that the main tribes surrendering to Claudius were the Catuvellauni, Regni and Cantiaci, all of whose lands bordered the now defeated Trinovantes. Joining these three tribes in pledging allegiance to Rome were probably the Corieltauvi, Atrebates, Belgae and Dobunni (for more on the tribes of Britain, see our map overleaf). Their leaders must have quickly come to the realisation that Rome boasted vastly superior military forces, and that it was better to capitulate than see their people die needlessly. They must also have reflected that, with the Trinovantes, their tribal competitor, now smashed, siding with Rome would be good for business.

Certainly, when we look in the archaeological record for the period, it's clear that the Trinovantes were the ultimate losers in the

immediate aftermath of the Roman invasion, suffering the indignity of witnessing a huge fortress being built over the remains of their capital. Meanwhile, the Catuvellauni, Atrebates, Belgae, Regni and Dobunni were all provided with brand new Mediterranean-style towns. The message was clear: being with Rome was a good thing; standing against them spelt disaster.

Further afield, the Iceni of Norfolk and the Brigantes (a tribe that occupied much of what is now Yorkshire) weren't immediately brought into the empire, having no new towns, temples or villas built in their territory. Instead, the Roman government seems to have paid them off, offering their leaders lavish gifts in order to keep them sweet (a policy that, in the case of the Iceni, broke down in spectacular fashion in around AD 60 with Boudicca's rebellion).

But what about the Iron Age tribes of south-western Britain – which included the Durotriges? Our understanding of their relationship with Rome's legions is less clear,

Roman invasion of Britain

as there's no useful written evidence to tell us exactly what happened. We do know that one legion, the II Augusta – comprising more than 5,000 heavily armed, well-trained, professional soldiers – was dispatched westwards, across an area we now recognise as Hampshire, Dorset and Devon, with orders to “conquer the rest”.

The commander of the II Augusta was a general by the name of Vespasian and, as he later became emperor (in AD 69), the Roman biographer Suetonius recorded the early part of his career. In Britain, Suetonius tells us, Vespasian oversaw the conquest of the Isle of Wight, fighting 30 battles, capturing more than 20 towns and receiving the surrender of two powerful tribes. The location of these battles and details of the towns the Romans captured go unrecorded, but it was long believed that the Durotriges were among the powerful tribes that the legions beat into submission – and that much of the fighting probably took place in their territory.

Long time dead

Prior to the invasion, archaeology shows that the Durotriges seem to have profited little in the way of trade contact with the Roman empire. Presumably, they would have seen few benefits in joining Rome, and would have viewed the arrival of Vespasian as a thoroughly bad thing. Given that some of the largest and most impressive Iron Age hillforts anywhere in Britain are found in Dorset – sites like Maiden Castle, Hod Hill, Hambleton Hill and Badbury Rings – it was naturally assumed that these sites formed the focus of organised resistance.

But there's a problem with this theory, one that has been thrown into ever sharper focus as our knowledge of Mortimer Wheeler's “war cemetery” – and Dorset's Iron Age hillforts more generally – has improved. For a start, the skeletons that Wheeler's team

The location of these battles is unrecorded, but it was long believed that the Durotriges were among the tribes beaten into submission

Conquered territories

Our map shows British tribes at the time of the Roman invasion

MAP BY PAUL HEWITT – BATTLEFIELD DESIGN



Great Witcombe Roman villa in the Cotswolds, which was the heart of Dobunni territory

Luxury homes

Based in the Cotswolds, the **Dobunni** surrendered to the Romans early and had a capital created for them at Cirencester. Dobunni lands had the greatest number of wealthy Roman villas in Britain.

Way out west

The **Demetae** were never fully Romanised, thanks to a scattered population and extensive upland territory. A town was established for them at Carmarthen, but it was never really successful.

Brought to heel

The **Silures** fought a successful guerrilla campaign in south-west Wales but were eventually defeated. The II legion was permanently based at Caerleon.

Fight of fiction

It's traditionally been thought that, of all the tribes in the west, the **Durotriges** put up the greatest resistance. But, in fact, they were few in number and scattered as a people.



A Durotriges coin depicting three figures in a boat. The meaning of this image is unclear

Tin-rich zone

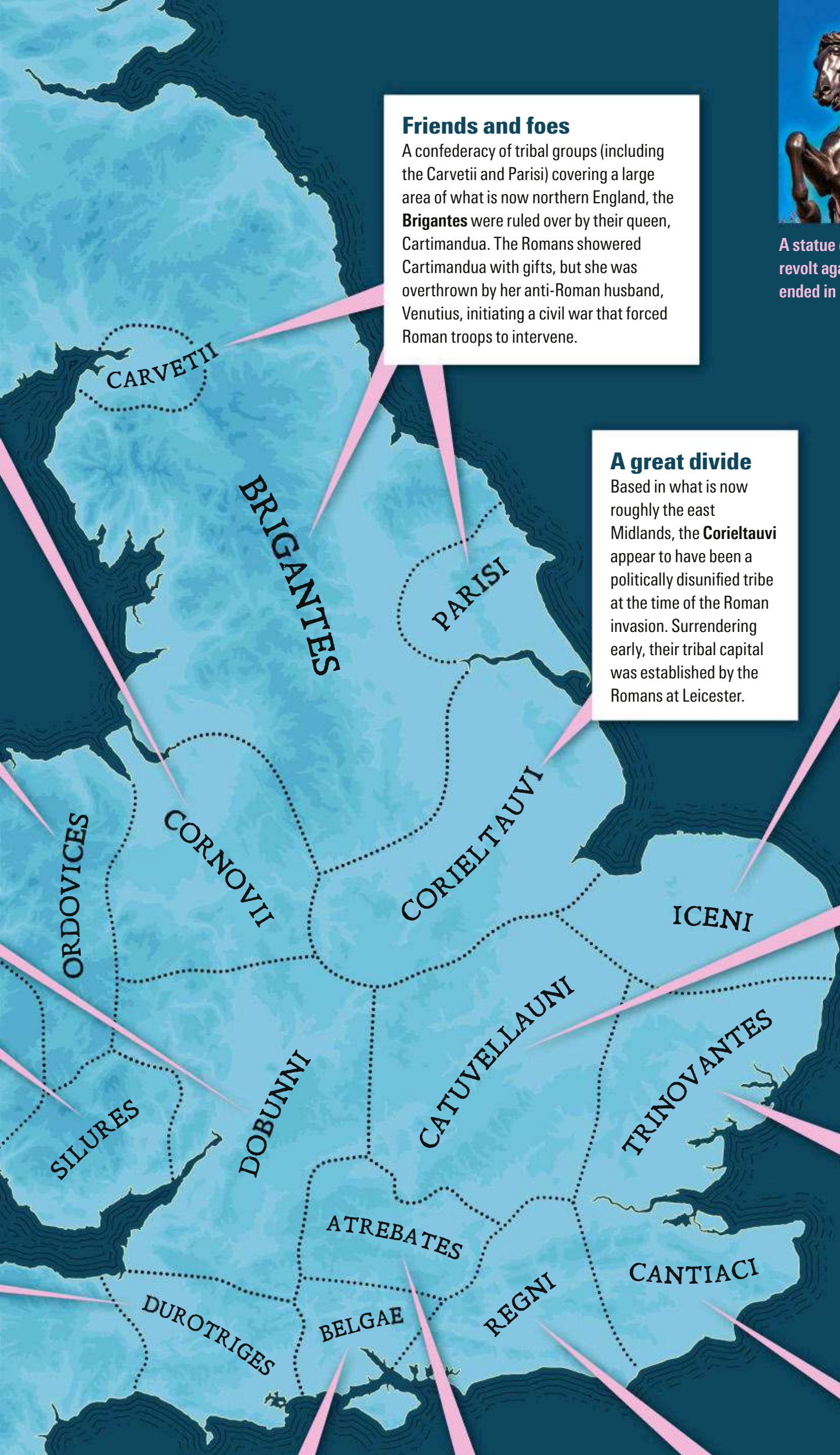
The lands of the **Dumnonii** covered a large area, across what is now Devon and Cornwall. Their low-level of settlement, combined with agriculturally poor land, meant the Roman way of life never took hold, although the Romans heavily exploited the tin-rich zones of Cornwall. Their capital was established at Exeter.

Uphill battles

Occupying the uplands of what is now Shropshire, the **Cornovii** proved difficult to govern, given the landscape and the dispersed nature of the population. The Romans established Wroxeter as their tribal capital.

The outsiders

Covering a large area of what is now north Wales, the **Ordovices** were never fully conquered or Romanised. A garrison remained on the edges of their lands throughout the Roman period.



Friends and foes

A confederacy of tribal groups (including the Carvetii and Parisi) covering a large area of what is now northern England, the **Brigantes** were ruled over by their queen, Cartimandua. The Romans showered Cartimandua with gifts, but she was overthrown by her anti-Roman husband, Venutius, initiating a civil war that forced Roman troops to intervene.



A statue of Boudicca, whose revolt against the Romans ended in disaster for the Iceni

Boudicca's last stand

The **Iceni** appeared to be on good terms with the Romans until the death of their king Prasutagus, after which Roman troops subjugated them. Under the leadership of Queen Boudicca, the Iceni rose up and sacked three Roman towns before being crushed in battle. The tribe never recovered.

A great divide

Based in what is now roughly the east Midlands, the **Corieltavi** appear to have been a politically disunited tribe at the time of the Roman invasion. Surrendering early, their tribal capital was established by the Romans at Leicester.

Giving up the fight

The **Catuvellauni** were one of the largest of the southern British tribes. Originally anti-Roman, they fought Julius Caesar when he invaded in 54 BC. But the Catuvellauni later came to benefit from trade with Rome. They surrendered soon after Claudius's invasion.

The cost of rebellion

A powerful tribe covering an area broadly equating with modern Essex and southern Suffolk, the **Trinovantes** were the main target of the Roman military in AD 43. Following their defeat, the tribe lost their capital of Camulodunum (Colchester). When the Iceni rose in revolt against Rome in AD 60, the Trinovantes joined them, but were crushed in battle.



King Caratacus led resistance to the Roman invasion

Recent arrivals

Originally from mainland Europe, the **Belgae** were heavily engaged in trade with the Romans, who built them a capital at Winchester.

Aid mission

Deeply influenced by Rome, Verica, king of the **Atrebates**, fled to Claudius around AD 40 to seek military support.

Land of palaces

The **Regni** embraced Roman culture and were rewarded with a series of palatial houses, the greatest of which is at Fishbourne.

Capital gain

The **Cantiaci** were extremely pro-Roman, and gained a new capital, Canterbury, following Claudius's invasion.

Roman invasion of Britain

discovered in 1936 are not the product of a single event. Rather, it appears that they were buried over an extended time period – and, crucially, that the trauma they exhibited on their discovery was largely the result of executions rather than battle injuries.

Just as tellingly, the iron projectile in the spine of one skeleton – one that Wheeler believed had been fired by Roman forces – is actually an Iron Age spear. The final blow to the theory of armed conflict between Rome and the Durotriges is the discovery that the Durotriges had vacated the hillfort at least a century before the Romans arrived. In AD 43, Maiden Castle was no battle-ready fortress but an abandoned set of earthworks, its grass-covered ramparts probably undefended.

It's been suggested that a second Dorset hillfort, Hod Hill, was also the target of a Roman attack – perhaps an artillery barrage unleashed by II Augusta. A small Roman fort was indeed built inside the Iron Age hillfort, and archaeological investigations, conducted in the 1950s, found multiple projectiles fired from a Roman device known as a ballista. However, we now know that Hod Hill, like Maiden Castle, was largely empty in AD 43, and it's likely that the bolts found were fired from the Roman fort during a period of peace-time target practice.

Legions on the march

So it seems that the Durotriges didn't take the fight to the Romans. And that was probably a wise decision. Ongoing archaeological investigation is showing us that the Durotriges lived in small farming communities, rather than in large groups inside strongly defended hillforts. They were probably too few in number, too widely scattered and too politically disorganised to offer any significant resistance.

In fact, the idea that any of the various Iron Age tribes of southern Britain had the capability to truly test the Romans on the battlefield is a fantasy based on the modern misguided idea that they possessed large standing armies. Only when tribes pooled their resources, which rarely seems to have happened, or deployed guerrilla tactics, ambushing legions on the march, could they achieve anything. Faced with the superior numbers, training and equipment of a Roman legion, individual tribal warriors and poorly armed farmers could achieve little.

Does this mean that the Durotriges surrendered to the Romans – just as their counterparts in the south-east had done? Well, actually, no. Many tribes in the south-west of Britain – such as the Dumnonii of what is now Cornwall and Devon, the Silures of today's south Wales and the Durotriges themselves – appear to have decided that



Reflecting the past

The Chesil Mirror, discovered in a grave in Dorset. Durotriges burials suggest that they largely eschewed Roman artefacts

neither fighting the Romans nor capitulation was the best course of action for them. With little experience of trading with the Romans, and no chance of besting them on the battlefield, they pursued a third option: and that was to ignore them.

Disposing of the dead

Compared to their Iron Age neighbours to the east, the Durotriges were unusual in a variety of ways. They buried their dead in cemeteries, while other tribes practised cremation or disposed of their dead in places where modern archaeologists cannot find them, such as rivers or lakes. This Durotriges disposal practice has proved extremely informative for archaeologists, allowing them to better understand the tribe through their skeletal remains and associated grave goods. And, crucially, these finds suggest that the Durotriges' settlements continued uninterrupted beyond the Roman "conquest". Traditional forms of burial were maintained

for many more generations, and grave goods, placed within native-style burial grounds, avoided all but the most basic of Roman artefacts.

Personal possessions are relatively simple, comprising bronze brooches, bangles, rings and occasionally decorated mirrors. The Durotriges, it seems, wanted only those Roman items, such as hair-plucking tweezers and pottery drinking cups, that fitted into their existing lifestyle. They had little interest in anything that might usher in a more Mediterranean style of living.

Durotriges customs may have differed from their Roman counterparts in another key aspect: gender relations. It's perhaps interesting to note that greater numbers of artefacts are found in female graves, suggesting that women enjoyed a higher status. Perhaps the Durotriges were a matriarchal society, political power passing down the female line. Certainly, Roman writers of the time often observed that in the "barbarian" lands of Britain, women were just as likely to hold power as men, something the patriarchal Romans just couldn't understand.

In the second half of the first century AD, the Roman government created the new town of Durnovaria Durotrigum (Dorchester) for the tribe, to act as their administrative and economic centre. It was never truly successful, only really developing more than three centuries later, under the patronage of a few wealthy individuals who built a series of well-appointed private houses: a sort of Roman gated community.

All this evidence paints a picture of a tribe that had no desire to become Roman. Archaeology tells us that the Durotriges seem to have been unaware of the ideas, fashions and artefacts that best defined Rome, shunning the status symbols acquired by their Romanised tribal colleagues to the east. The "Roman project" was not for them.

It seems that the Durotriges calculated that passive resistance was the best way to preserve their customs, their culture and their way of life. And perhaps they were right. Maybe it was this apathy towards the Roman empire that both defined them and helped them to survive. **H**

The Durotriges shunned the Mediterranean status symbols beloved of south-eastern tribes. The "Roman project" wasn't for them

Miles Russell is a senior lecturer in prehistoric and Roman archaeology at Bournemouth University. He will be presenting two episodes of *Unearthing Britannia's Tribes*, a new Essay series on the Iron Age, which is airing now on BBC Radio 3



VISIT

You can see one of the skeletons from the Maiden Castle "war cemetery" in the archaeology gallery of Dorset Museum. dorsetmuseum.org

Detecting the *dead*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, photographed by the medium Ada Deane with someone described as a "spirit" in 1922. By then, the author was the foremost public advocate of talking to people on the "other side"



Following personal tragedy, the creator of that most rational of literary figures, Sherlock Holmes, developed an obsession with spiritualism. **Fiona Snailham** and **Anna Maria Barry** explore the supernatural interests of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

On a July evening in 1930, 10,000 people crowded into London's Royal Albert Hall, hoping to catch a glimpse of their hero, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and perhaps even hear him speak. Sure enough, the celebrated author turned up right on time. Dressed in an evening suit, the man behind the Sherlock Holmes phenomenon took his seat on stage and began to talk. But there was something very strange about Doyle – he was dead.

The event at the Albert Hall was a seance – an attempt to communicate with “the other side”. Doyle, who had died just a few days earlier, was the world's most famous proponent of spiritualism – a religious movement based on the belief that the living can speak to the dead. In life, the author had attended countless seances, written books on supernatural phenomena and toured the world giving lectures on his beliefs. In death, his supporters hoped that he would appear before them once again.

Spiritualism once had a huge following in Britain. People have long been fascinated by the idea of life after death, and the Victorians were no exception. The 19th-century craze for spiritualism originated across the Atlantic in 1848, when two young girls from rural New York came forward with an extraordinary claim. Sisters Kate and Maggie Fox were just 11 and 14 when they announced to the world that they could communicate with spirits. The departed, they said, spoke to them by “rapping” – spelling out messages with a series of knocking sounds. Though years later the sisters apparently confessed that this episode had been a hoax, at the time their abilities convinced many.

A craze for post-mortem communication quickly swept the US, and many mediums – claiming that they, too, had the ability to speak with the dead – made a name (and money) for themselves. Several travelled across the Atlantic to demonstrate their skill in Britain, where high-profile seance attendees included poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning and social reformer Robert Owen. Throughout the 19th century, the movement grew in momentum, and celebrity mediums offered public demonstrations in theatres and town halls. Public interest was piqued and spiritualist groups began to appear across Britain.

Though it may be surprising to learn that the brain behind arch-rationalist Sherlock Holmes believed in the supernatural, the path from supersleuth to ghost-hunter is shorter than you might expect, not least because many spiritualists were greatly concerned with evidence. They conducted tests, interviews and experiments to expose fraudsters



Elsie Wright with a winged gnome, in a photograph taken by her cousin Frances Griffiths in 1917. Doyle regarded the Cottingley Fairies as proof of psychic phenomena, yet the cousins later revealed that they were a hoax

The Fox sisters claimed that the dead spoke to them via a series of knocking sounds



When, in 1848, Kate and Maggie Fox claimed they could speak with the dead, they triggered a spiritualism craze in America

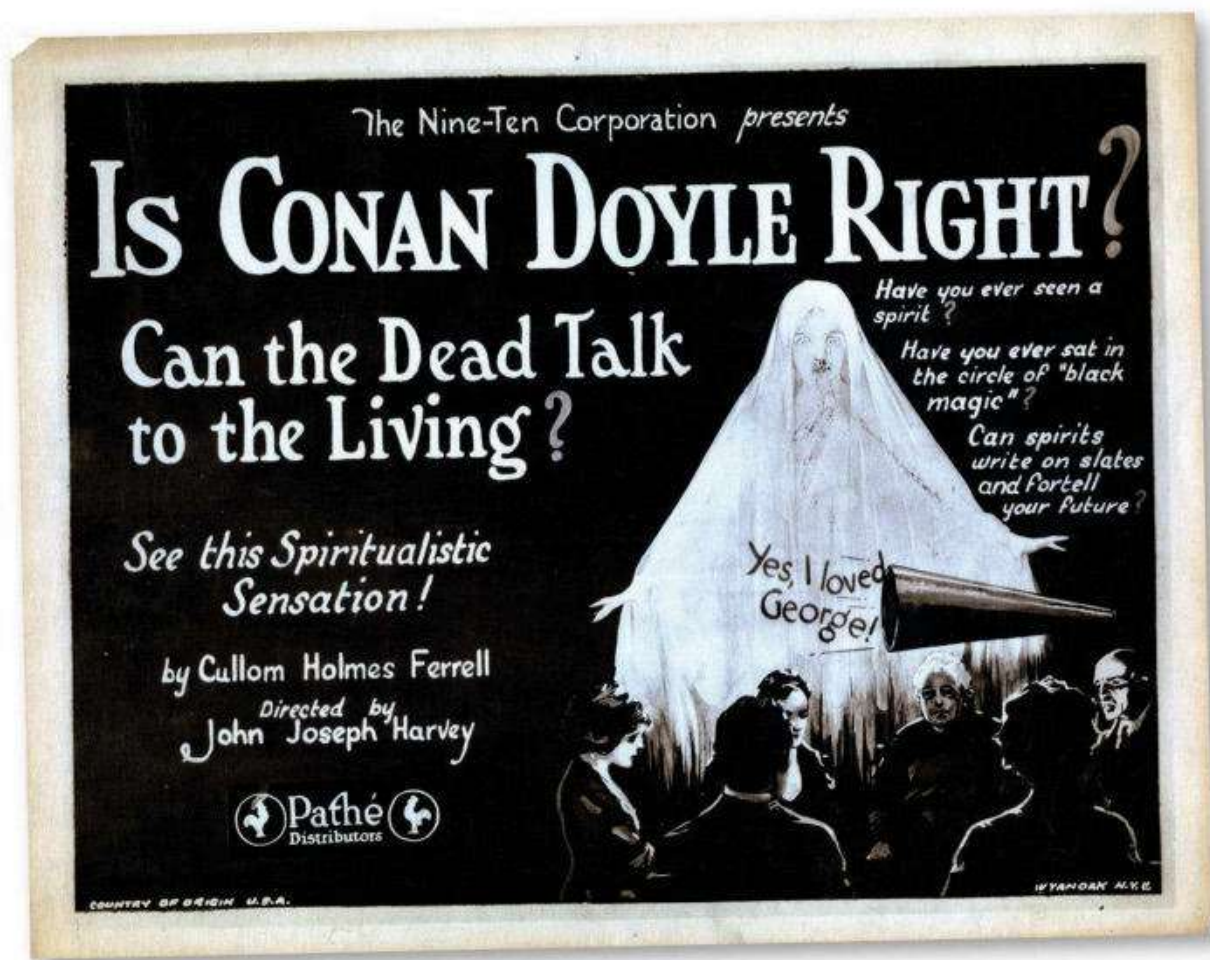
and provide definitive proof of life after death. Holmes once said that “when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth”. Not many spiritualists would have disagreed.

“The greatest nonsense”

Doyle's interest in the unexplained began early in his career, when he was working as a newly qualified doctor. Though initially a sceptic who considered spiritual phenomena “the greatest nonsense upon Earth”, his curiosity was piqued by an experiment in “thought transference”. This involved Doyle drawing images on a piece of paper and attempting to communicate them telepathically to a friend. This companion, who could not see Doyle's drawings, would then sketch the messages he “received” on a second piece of paper. Doyle was astounded to discover that again and again his friend presented an image identical to his own.

This sparked an intense interest in the young doctor, who began to research psychic phenomena around the world. Doyle was particularly fascinated to discover that people of very different cultures had reported the same supernatural experiences. Could there be something in this? He began to attend seances and, though many left him unimpressed, he was staggered by some of the information he received: personal details the medium could not possibly have known.

In 1882, the Society for Psychical Research



A lobbycard for the 1923 film *Is Conan Doyle Right?* Doyle's interest in spiritualism appears to have been fired by the desire to communicate with his son Kingsley, who died during the First World War

(SPR) was founded with the aim of conducting scientific investigations into spiritualist phenomena. This was no band of amateurs: its members included eminent scientists and professors including chemists, physicists and psychologists. When Doyle joined the SPR in 1893, the president was Arthur Balfour, who would later become British prime minister. The author contributed to the society's activities, weeding out frauds and subjecting self-proclaimed mediums to rigorous testing.

A joyous reunion

The carnage wrought by both the First World War and the 1918 influenza pandemic attracted many more adherents to spiritualism. People who had recently suffered great loss now turned for solace to a new movement that offered the possibility of contacting the dead. In early 1919, the Spiritualists' National Union organised a national memorial service at the Royal Albert Hall, with an estimated 7,000 people attending what was later called a "joyous reunion" with the fallen. Doyle, who wrote a report of the service for the spiritualist magazine *Light*, was among those whose grief pushed them to explore the unexplained. The author had lost several close family members, including his son Kingsley, who died (possibly from flu or pneumonia) in October 1918, aged 25.

One night in 1919, Doyle and his wife, Jean, attended a seance with the medium Evan Powell, a modest Welshman who refused to accept payment for his efforts. During the session, conducted in the dark, Kingsley Doyle appeared and spoke to his parents. When they asked if he was happy,

Kingsley's voice was heard to respond: "Yes, I am so happy!" The spirit even bent his father's head forward to kiss it. For Doyle, this was the ultimate proof: he was convinced that he had heard his son's voice and felt his presence. From that point on, spiritualism became the most important thing in his life, and he became its foremost public defender.

Soon afterwards, Doyle went one step further and announced his belief in fairies. This was yet another strange story that began with two young girls. In 1917, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths, cousins aged 16 and 9, claimed to have photographed fairies in the village of Cottingley, West Yorkshire. Their images of dancing fairies baffled photographic experts, who could not work out how they had been faked. That was enough for Doyle, who wrote a series of articles and, in 1922, a book arguing that these fairies constituted yet more proof of psychic phenomena. Predictably, he was lampooned in the press as a gullible man tricked by children. Indeed, years later the girls admitted their deception, revealing that the fairies had been drawn on card and pinned to strands of grass.

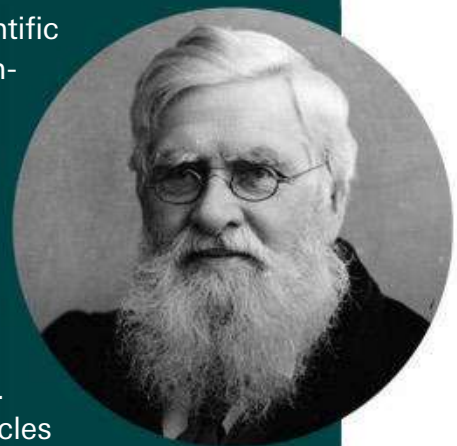
His controversial defence of the Cottingley fairies was not the only time Doyle published personal opinions on contemporary sensations. In 1923, he used newspaper interviews to insert himself into discussions about the death of Lord Carnarvon, a prominent Egyptologist who had backed the search for Tutankhamun's tomb. Doyle refused to believe that the earl's death was the result of blood poisoning; rather, he told the press, the death may have been caused by "elementals" – spirits conjured by Tutankhamun's priests to guard the royal tomb. His comments were

DEAD RECKONERS

Three more famous spiritualist adherents

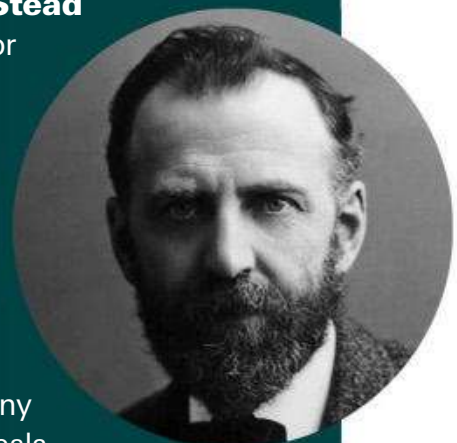
The eminent evolutionist

A belief in spiritualism damaged the scientific reputation of the influential 19th-century naturalist **Alfred Russel Wallace**, who pioneered a theory of evolution at the same time as Charles Darwin. Wallace wrote articles in defence of spiritualism and even provided testimony in support of "Dr" Henry Slade, when this suspect medium was tried for fraud.



The investigative journalist

The reporter **WT Stead** was best known for writing exposés on issues such as child abuse. His interest in psychic phenomena led him to establish the newspaper *Borderland*, one of many spiritualist periodicals published in Britain. None of the messages he received from the "other side" warned Stead against boarding the *Titanic* – and he perished during its ill-fated voyage in 1912.



The acclaimed novelist

Bestselling writer **Rosamond Lehmann**, author of 1927's *Dusty Answer*, turned to spiritualism after the loss to polio of her young daughter, Sarah, in 1958. Lehmann soon became a prominent spiritualist, writing about her otherworldly experiences, and serving as vice-president at London's College of Psychic Studies.





Harry Houdini (right) demonstrates one of the tricks that, he believed, mediums used to dupe their customers: ringing a bell with their toes



Doyle suggested that Lord Carnarvon (pictured, right, with Howard Carter) had been killed by spirits conjured by Tutankhamun's priests

Harry Houdini, a spiritualism sceptic, called Doyle “senile” and “easily bamboozled”



The medium Estelle Roberts, pictured in 1938, introduced Arthur Conan Doyle to a 10,000-strong Royal Albert Hall audience shortly after his death

reported in the London *Daily News* and *The Morning Post*, popularising the idea of a “mummy’s curse”.

A shared interest in spiritualism inspired an unusual relationship between Doyle and the world-famous escapologist Harry Houdini. Doyle was convinced that his friend was in possession of supernatural abilities that enabled his death-defying escapes. Houdini was more inclined to scepticism, particularly after attending a seance with Doyle. When the spirit of Houdini’s beloved mother apparently spoke to him in English – a language in which they had never communicated during her life – he was unconvinced.

Over the next few years Houdini began to crusade against spiritualism, giving lectures and public demonstrations of the tricks that mediums used to take in the gullible. He even attacked his former friend, calling Doyle “senile” and “easily bamboozled”. Such a feud developed that, when Houdini died in 1926, some speculated that spiritualists had murdered him. Doyle, in a way, had the last laugh. He told journalists that the escapologist’s death at the age of just 52 had come as no surprise: Houdini’s mother had told him at a seance that her son would die early.

Hello from the other side

Doyle made his own journey to the “other side” on 7 July 1930, having suffered a heart attack in his garden. Fittingly, death did not mean the end of his spiritualist activity. Shortly after his passing, Doyle’s family and friends set up the seance at the Royal Albert Hall, in the belief that this long-time proponent of spiritualism would want an

opportunity to send his own message from beyond the grave. Every seat in the house was filled – except one, which was reserved for the spirit of Sir Arthur.

A series of spiritualists offered eulogies before Mrs Estelle Roberts stepped on to the stage. A celebrated medium, Roberts demonstrated her clairvoyance to the audience before declaring that the deceased author was in the room, appropriately attired in his evening dress. Approaching Lady Doyle, he whispered news from beyond, though the exact contents of Sir Arthur’s final message to the woman he loved were never revealed.

That was still not the end. Four years later, Doyle’s spirit appeared at a meeting hosted by the Latvian medium Noah Zerdin at Aeolian Hall on New Bond Street. With the foresight to record proceedings, Zerdin caught the disembodied voice of Doyle on tape, asking those present to “take care of my boys and my good wife, Jean”. Whether the audio, held in the British Library Archives, is proof of life beyond the grave is open to question. Doyle, for one, would believe it is. **H**

Fiona Snailham is an early career researcher specialising in 19th-century literature. Her current research focus is Victorian spiritualism. **Anna Maria Barry** is a historian and writer specialising in 19th-century culture. Her current research focuses on death masks

LISTEN

To listen to Gyles Brandreth praise the achievements of Arthur Conan Doyle on BBC Radio 4’s **Great Lives**, go to bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b01s4g7j

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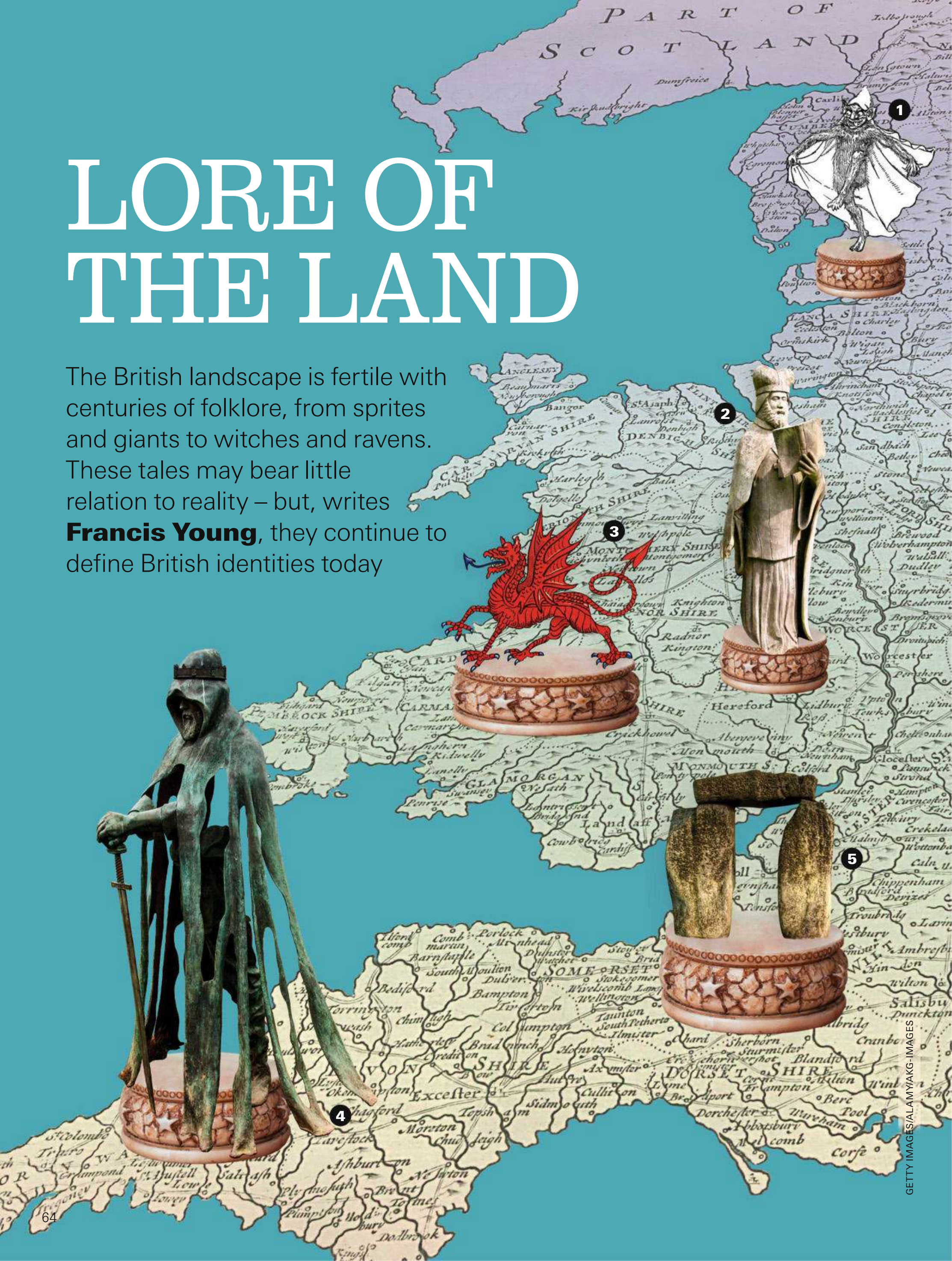


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LORE OF THE LAND

The British landscape is fertile with centuries of folklore, from sprites and giants to witches and ravens. These tales may bear little relation to reality – but, writes **Francis Young**, they continue to define British identities today



A nation of folklore

- 1 An 1892 illustration of a brownie from Scottish folklore
- 2 A carved figure of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the father of British folklore
- 3 The red dragon is well established as the national emblem of Wales
- 4 A bronze statue at Tintagel, Cornwall, inspired in part by King Arthur's legend
- 5 Stonehenge – according to folklore, the “work of giants”
- 6 A 13th-century illumination of Merlin
- 7 The Green Man has come to symbolise British folklore
- 8 The giant Gog at London's Guildhall
- 9 The ravens of the Tower of London represent a relatively new folklore
- 10 Even Harry Potter has connections to British folklore



Somewhere near the town of Longtown on the banks of the river Esk, in one of the last parcels of land to be disputed between Scotland and England before the Union of Crowns of 1603, is the supposed site of the battle of Arthuret. Nothing to do with King Arthur (in spite of its name), the legendary battle is traditionally dated to AD 573, when local British king Gwenddoleu ap Ceidio was killed by a rival in a disastrous defeat. Gwenddoleu's bard, Myrddin, was driven mad by the sight of the slaughter and fled into a nearby forest, where he lived as a wild man among the beasts. Yet by immersing himself in nature, Myrddin received the gift of prophecy. Today, he is better known by his anglicised name: Merlin, a composite figure constructed in the 12th century by Geoffrey of Monmouth from Myrddin and another figure of Welsh legend named Ambrosius.

At Arthuret, where Welsh-speaking forces clashed in a place later disputed between England and Scotland, the national identities that would one day make up Great Britain literally and symbolically converge. The battle gave birth to a truly British figure: Merlin was claimed equally in the Middle Ages by England, Wales, Scotland and Brittany. The prophet and enchanter would go on to become a repository for countless fantasies about magic and occult knowledge. In his incarnation as the wild man of the woods, Merlin even prefigures the Green Man, who often symbolises British folklore.

With its intensely local character, folklore may seem a strange place to look for "Britishness" – a sense of common national identity shared by all the peoples of Great Britain – but Merlin is an example of a character who is both genuinely and distinctively British.

Britain's origin myth

In the fifth century, Britain, which had been united under the Romans (with the exception of the Scottish Highlands), broke into a series of small kingdoms. This process of dissolution was accelerated by Germanic settlers, who brought a new culture and language to what became England. In the Anglo-Saxon period, the concept of Britain was all but forgotten beyond Welsh lands, only to return in the wake of an unlikely saviour: William the Conqueror. The Duke of Normandy relied on the help of a number of Breton knights for his conquest, many of whom settled in Welsh-speaking areas and became captivated by the idea of a return of British glory.

A likely descendant of a Breton conqueror, a man named Geoffrey of Monmouth, would become the father of British folklore. In his

In his incarnation as the wild man of the woods, Merlin even prefigures the Green Man, who often symbolises British folklore



More myth than man The character of Merlin, seen in a late 19th-century illustration by Aubrey Beardsley from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, was a composite put together "Frankenstein-like"



Ancient muse A 19th-century magazine illustration of folkloric beings. Creatures such as giants, elves and fairies have captivated artists for centuries, long after their origins have been lost

12th-century *The History of the Kings of Britain*, he began fabricating a splendid origin myth for Britain, claiming that it had been founded by none other than a Trojan prince named Brutus, fleeing Troy like Aeneas, the founder of Rome in Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Geoffrey's "history" was anything but, peopled with such outlandish characters as King Bladud, founder of Bath, who worked necromancy to give himself the power of flight. Geoffrey's most lasting confabulations were the figures of Arthur and Merlin, both composite constructions that he put together, Frankenstein-like, from a mixture of history, myth and fiction. Exactly how he did this has baffled scholars ever since.

Even in his own lifetime, Geoffrey's writings fell under the suspicion of other historians, and by the 17th century his works had long been jettisoned from the historical canon. His influence on folklore remained, however, travelling outwards like ripples in a pond. The two great wicker giants who appear in the Lord Mayor of London's Show every year are a case in point: they are Gog and Magog, giants whom Brutus found living on the island of Britain.

These giants were, on one level, just British versions of the titans of Greek mythology. Yet Geoffrey was also faithful to a much older Anglo-Saxon tradition that interpreted Britain's ancient monuments as *enta geweorc*, "the work of giants". According to Geoffrey, the giants built Stonehenge in Ireland before Merlin transported it by magic to Salisbury Plain. This is one instance where the truth turned out to be almost as strange as the fables, as we now know that one version of Stonehenge was indeed transported from a distant land in the prehistoric west – not from Ireland, but Wales's Preseli Hills.

Invoking folklore

Many British rulers have drawn on the unifying power of folklore at times of crisis and change. Henry Tudor, whose claim to the throne was somewhat slender, promoted his Welsh ancestry as a supposed descendant of King Arthur. He displayed the red dragon of Wales on his personal standard and named his heir Arthur. Henry VIII oversaw the painting of the replica of the round table in Winchester, while the magician John Dee encouraged Elizabeth I to claim the "New World" as it had already been conquered by her legendary ancestor, Arthur.

But it was James VI & I, more than any other monarch, who needed all the help he could get to promote his Britishness. While never his formal title, the first Scottish king to rule England styled himself "King of Great Britain". His succession in 1603 was supposedly marked by an overflowing of the



Britain's unlikely founder

In the 12th century, the cleric Geoffrey of Monmouth created an enormously influential origin myth for Britain – one that saw the nation being founded by the Trojan prince Brutus. This 15th-century illustration shows Brutus arriving in Britain, slaying giants and building a city, possibly London

Britain's folklore

Round and round

The iconography of King Arthur, such as his knights and the round table, is instantly recognisable – Arthur and Merlin have “penetrated Britain’s collective consciousness”



Folkloric forebears

Members of the Guild of Young Freemen process through London in the Lord Mayor’s Show in 2013 with wicker figures of the folkloric giants Gog and Magog



river Tweed, causing its waters to mingle with the river Pausyl at a place named Merlin’s Grave. Thus the prophecy of 13th-century Scottish seer Thomas the Rhymer was fulfilled:

“When Tweed and Pausyl meet at Merlin’s grave / Scotland and England shall one monarch have.”

James’s arrival in London brought an outpouring of literary reflections on Britishness, none more spectacular than Michael Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion*, the first part of which appeared in 1612. *Poly-Olbion* was an ambitious series of poems and allegorical maps originally supposed to consist of three parts covering every location in England, Wales and Scotland, but Drayton died before Scotland could be completed. While he took inspiration from classical literature, his work was also characteristically British, drawing heavily on Geoffrey of Monmouth and more reliable historical sources such as William Camden’s *Britannia* (1586), the first complete antiquarian survey of the country.

What was perhaps most remarkable about *Poly-Olbion* was its synthesis of topographical and cartographical accuracy with the fantastical. Drayton’s maps personified every city, town, village, river and body of water as an anthropomorphic nymph or deity, but

at the same time he took pains to ensure the maps were as accurate as possible.

Drayton drew on pre-existing traditions and invented a new mythology that peopled Britain’s landscape with mythical beings. *Poly-Olbion* includes characters such as the giant Gogmagog, a figure created in the Middle Ages from the biblical giants Gog and Magog, who fell in love with the nymph Granta. Gogmagog gave his name to the Gog Magog Hills south of Cambridge, and Granta gave hers to the river that runs through Cambridge and to an early name for the town itself: Grantebrycge.

In *Poly-Olbion*, the trend for comprehensive antiquarian surveys collided with a deep desire for meaning in the landscape: a yearning for every place to have its personified protective spirit, and its classicised origin myth involving nymphs and giants. It was almost as though Drayton’s nymphs and deities took the place of those protectors displaced by the Reformation: the saints.

Obsessed with druids

British folklore is immensely diverse. Every region has its distinctive characters, such as the boggarts of the north of England, the pixies of Cornwall and Devon, and the hikey

sprites – a kind of fairy unique to Norfolk. Scotland’s fairies are known for “trooping” around the landscape, while England’s are largely isolated domestic helpers; Scottish witches work together in covens, while the English witch is a solitary individual.

Yet some folkloric beings have become national symbols, perhaps because local cultural creations are ultimate representations of the uniqueness and character of a nation. The red dragon, Loch Ness monster and leprechaun are instantly recognisable symbols of Wales, Scotland and Ireland respectively, even if their folkloric origins are now neglected. An equivalent being that represents England or the whole of Great Britain is more elusive, although Romantic poet William Blake attempted to supply such a figure in his “Giant Albion”.

Blake’s abiding contribution to a national identity was the poem “And did those feet in ancient time”, set to music by Hubert Parry as ‘Jerusalem’, which has acquired the status of an unofficial national anthem for England. This poem was inspired by folklore – in this case the legend that Joseph of Arimathea brought the Holy Grail to Britain and founded Glastonbury Abbey. The story’s origins are obscure, although in 1345 Edward III



Fact and fantasy

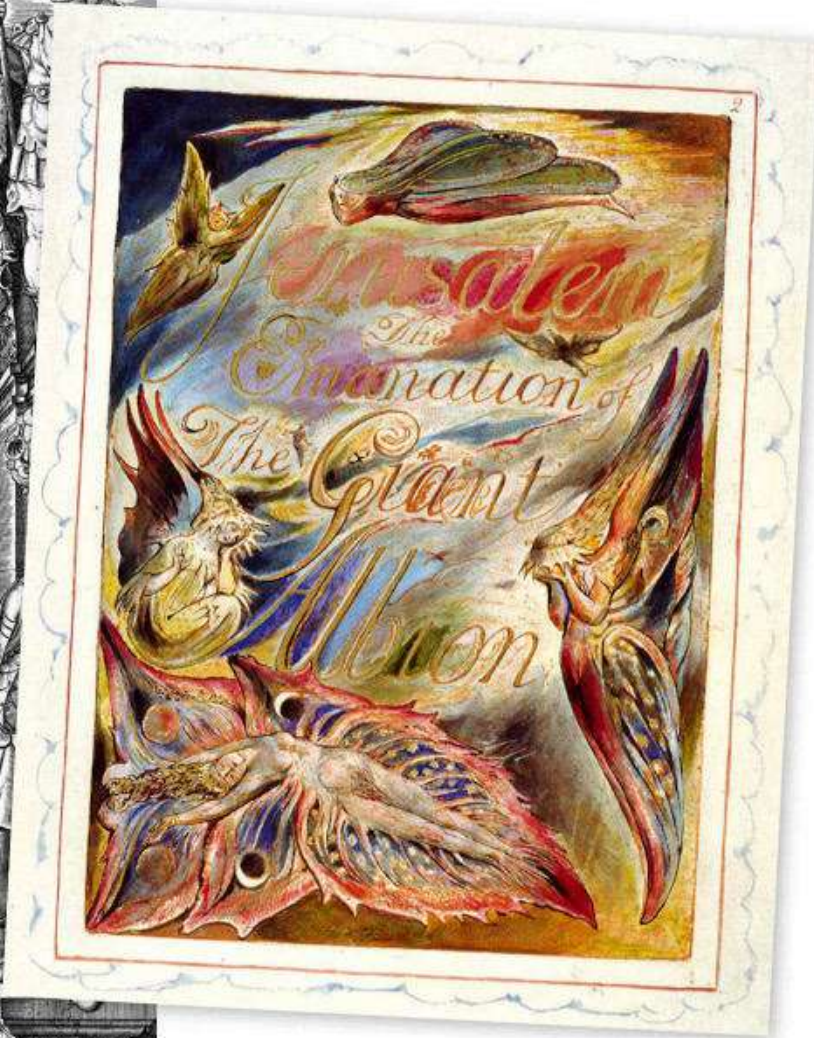
The elaborate title page to Michael Drayton's collection of topographical and folklore-inspired poems, *Poly-Olbion*, created by the engraver William Hole

sanctioned a search for Joseph's tomb at Glastonbury, where the supposed tombs of Arthur and Guinevere had been found in the 12th century.

This desire to realise legend through archaeology continued beyond the Middle Ages. The Jacobean court architect Inigo Jones thought Stonehenge was built by the Romans in a "druidic" style, and was once roofed over, showcasing a lost architectural style of ancient Britain. In the 18th century, antiquarian William Stukeley grew so obsessed with the druids that he adopted a druidic name, Chyndonax, and built megaliths in his garden.

Ultimately, the shared mythological figures of Great Britain will always be those created by Geoffrey of Monmouth: Arthur and Merlin, who have penetrated Britain's collective consciousness in spite of the absence of evidence that either really existed. In the realm of folklore, questions of historical existence are secondary – it is cultural influence that matters. It is no accident that the "Wizarding World" of JK Rowling venerates the memory of Merlin. Like a modern-day *Poly-Olbion*, Rowling's books are peopled by the cast of British folklore: giants, boggarts, Cornish pixies and kelpies.

Yet any idea that Britain's folklore is



Green and pleasant land

An etching from William Blake's *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*. The character of Albion did not become an established representation of England, but Blake's words "And did those feet in ancient time" inspired an unofficial anthem

During lockdown, British people reverted to ritual practices that were similar to those of their ancestors

reserved for fantasy fiction needs to be dismissed, because there are signs that the nation's collective lore is alive and well. In January 2021, one of the ravens of the Tower of London, Merlina, went missing. The story made national headlines, since many people still know that the ravens leaving the Tower of London betokens disaster for the country.

This legend is a microcosm of the power and flexibility of British folklore. The idea that the ravens are linked to the nation's safety is no older than the Second World War, and originated in some of the ravens being lent to a brewery to provide warning in the event of air raids. But a connection between the Tower of London and protection of the island of Britain is far older. In the *Mabino-*

gion, a collection of medieval Welsh tales, King Arthur buries the head of the giant Brân the Blessed on Tower Hill, where the White Tower will later be built. As long as Brân's head remains, Britain will be secure. Curiously, the Welsh name Brân means "raven".

Ritual behaviour

It is notable, in the fevered politics of recent years, how often populist politicians invoke almost spiritual concepts such as "Blitz spirit" in place of practical proposals. They are referenced so frequently that they have almost become personalities in their own right.

Similarly, while sovereignty was hitherto an abstract concept largely discussed by constitutional theorists, it has become for some a talismanic idea – unclear in meaning, perhaps, but invoked with religious fervour. It is hard, as a folklorist, not to think of the ancient personification of sovereignty as a goddess, such as Brigantia, who represented in Roman Britain what is today the north of England. Her name may lie at the root of the Welsh words *brenin* ("king") and *brenhinol* ("royal"), a reminder of the continuing significance of sovereignty as a sacred concept in ancient and contemporary Britain.

Behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic, meanwhile, suggests that people turn to folklore in times of uncertainty and crisis. During lockdown, "votive deposits" appeared in many parts of Britain – painted stones, "love locks" attached to bridges, ribbons tied to trees – and there was an increase in the habit of throwing coins into bodies of water. Although there is likely no single explanation for these behaviours, it is intriguing that, when activities other than a daily walk were unavailable, British people reverted to ritual practices similar to those of their ancestors. Ritual interactions with trees, including tying cloth to branches, are ancient practices, as are leaving pebbles at sites of ritual significance and throwing coins into water. These activities are not unique to Britain and Ireland, but such practices seem to be a wordless ritual language that unites us, at some level, even if we have little clear idea of what they really mean.

All of this points to the fact that seemingly recent folklore can have deep roots, and that folklore will sometimes transform beyond recognition over time. In spite of its huge diversity, a unifying strand of legend remains at the heart of British folklore: a common story and characters who belong equally to England, Scotland and Wales. It is no exaggeration to say that shared folklore is one of the things that holds Britain together. **H**

Francis Young is the author of *Magic in Merlin's Realm: A History of Occult Politics in Britain*, set to be published by Cambridge in March

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Alfred Fagon

A unique Caribbean voice

Having migrated from Jamaica as a teenager, Alfred Fagon emerged as a powerful playwright who created African-Caribbean characters to speak truths about the challenges facing black people in Britain. **STEPHEN BOURNE** introduces a writer who helped transform black British theatre in the 1970s and 80s



On 11 June 2020, a statue in Bristol was damaged. But while the media debates continued to rage about the toppling of the figure of slave trader Edward Colston during a Black Lives Matter protest the previous week, the defacement of this bronze bust in the St Pauls area attracted little comment. Arguably, though, the man depicted, the groundbreaking playwright and actor Alfred Fagon, is much more relevant to Bristol's residents today than the controversial merchant who lived three centuries earlier.

Born in southern Jamaica in 1937, one of 11 children of an orange-plantation worker, Fagon migrated to Britain in 1955 when his homeland was still a colony of the empire. Initially, the teenager worked for British Rail in Nottingham before a stint in the army – during which he became a boxing champion in the Royal Corps of Signals – and he then spent time travelling. By the time that Jamaica gained its independence in 1962, Fagon had made Bristol his home, settling in St Pauls and working as a welder. It was not long, however, before he began pursuing his dream of being an actor and writer.

In 1970, he won a role in *Black Pieces* by Trinidadian playwright Mustapha Matura, which opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London. This was a breakthrough for Fagon in more ways than one: not only did it mark his London acting debut, but Matura had broken new ground with this work in encouraging his

actors to speak in patois, the dialect of the Caribbean islands. Until that point, Fagon had never seen patois written down let alone used in theatre.

His friend Roland Rees, a pioneering theatre director, later observed how *Black Pieces* had “persuaded [Fagon] that he could write plays with characters that could tell his stories, culled from his own experience, in a language natural to them.

“He was convinced that this would lead him to write plays entirely different in style and emotional content to Matura,”

Rees added. “He knew he had a very different voice. But the one lesson he had learned along with the rest of the cast was... they now knew they did not have to try to be English anymore.”

Now settled in London, Fagon built relationships with others in the area, including director and fellow Jamaican Yvonne Brewster. “He came up and said he could tell at once we were [both] Jamaican,” she recalled of her first meeting with him on a London street in 1971. “That was typical Alfred: he was completely without barriers and he was one of the most straightforward people I’ve known in my life. He said: ‘Me is in a play – ICA!’”

Along with Brewster, Matura and Guyana-born writer Michael Abbensetts, Fagon became a major force in a new generation working in theatre, helping to change the stage scene with inspiring and challenging plays about Britain’s African-Caribbean community. As an actor who could also write, Fagon discovered a voice he used in creating drama that reflected his life and reality as a postwar settler in the so-called “Mother Country”.

Inspired by Matura’s writing and the Caribbean actors he worked with in *Black Pieces*, Fagon’s first production as a dramatist was *11 Josephine House*, presented in 1972 at the Almost Free Theatre in Soho, London. Directed by Rees, it focused on the life of a Jamaican family living in a Bristol block of flats. *The Stage* praised the play as “brilliantly entertaining, well written, and beautifully performed”. One of the cast, Oscar James, later reflected: “It was about West Indians bringing their own culture and community here, into England, into the English culture... There is unity in that life, whereas the whole English system was tearing them apart. It is about exile.”

Heart of the black community

Over the following decade and beyond, Fagon played a crucial role in the development of a new kind of black theatre in Britain. In 1974, when he directed his stage play *No Soldiers in St Pauls* at the Metro Club off Westbourne Grove in London, he took his work into the heart of the black community. The following year, *The Death of a Black Man* opened at London’s Hampstead Theatre, challenging audiences to consider themes of class, gender, money, African identity and, of course, race.

As well as his other plays *Four Hundred Pounds* (1982) and *Lonely Cowboy* (1985), Fagon wrote and starred in

Not only did *Black Pieces* mark Fagon’s professional acting debut, but it broke new ground by encouraging the actors to speak in patois



ILLUSTRATION BY **RACHEL DICKENS**

Shakespeare Country (1973) for BBC Two's *Thirty-Minute Theatre* series, a semi-autobiographical drama exploring the difficulties faced by a black actor trying to make his way in a profession dominated by the language of William Shakespeare. Regrettably, no recording of the bittersweet television play survives, though Fagon's script is preserved at the BBC Written Archives Centre.

Then, on 29 August 1986, Fagon suffered a heart attack while jogging near his home in Camberwell. He was declared dead on arrival at King's College Hospital, at the age of 49. But it was only when he failed to attend a rehearsal for a new television drama series that his agent, Harriet Cruickshank, was alerted to his absence by the BBC. Further enquiries revealed that although a police officer had reportedly visited Fagon's home, the body had not been identified, despite claims that his flat contained several items that should have revealed his identity. As a result, it was two weeks before his family and friends were made aware that he had died, by which time he had been

given a pauper's funeral.

In 1987, on the first anniversary of his death, a bronze bust of Fagon was installed on a black marble pedestal on the Grosvenor Road Triangle in St Pauls – making him the first black person so honoured in Bristol. Paul Stephenson, who chaired the committee that raised funds to erect the memorial, noted Fagon's popularity among Bristol's African-Caribbean community for his warmth and sensitivity.

The dramatist Howard Brenton remembers Fagon as “a really interesting man. He was a self-taught scholar, a street scholar, how the British working class used to be.” Roland Rees recalled how he “could be demure, motionless and silent one minute, gargantuan, life-enhancing and loud the next, qualities that always permeated the characters in his plays as did the streak of poetic invention that infused his own conversation”.

Ten years after Fagon's death, a memorial evening at the Tricycle Theatre in London paid tribute to his life and



Mustapha Matura from Trinidad (left) and Guyana-born Michael Abbensetts (right) were two writers who inspired Alfred Fagon's career as part of a new kind of black theatre in Britain



// Fagon captured the voices of black Britain: voices that were angry, confused, dissipated and isolated //

work. At the event, donations were collected in a hat, which were used to establish the Alfred Fagon Award for plays by writers from the Caribbean region or of Caribbean descent (in 2006, this was extended to include British African playwrights). The first recipient was Roy Williams. "To my everlasting shame, I did not know of Alfred Fagon at the time," he admitted. "When Alfred arrived in England in the fifties, the country, whether it liked it or not, was going through great change – arguably the biggest cultural change of its entire existence.

"Alfred Fagon and his generation of West Indians arriving in the UK were made to feel unwelcome by the dominant white population. This was very much the world of Fagon's plays," Williams continued. "He captured the voices of black Britain from those volatile times: voices that were angry, confused, dissipated and isolated, but beyond that, just black people struggling as well as striving to understand what it means to live their lives in this country. These are all issues and themes that, of course, have relevance today." **H**

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Stephen Bourne is a film and social historian and writer. His latest book is *Deep Are the Roots: Trailblazers Who Changed Black British Theatre* (The History Press, 2021). He'll be speaking about Alfred Fagon on our HistoryExtra podcast soon

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Joanne Campbell, Joan-Ann Maynard and Pauline Black (seen left to right) star in Mustapha Matura's play *Trinidad Sisters*, which premiered in 1988



The memorial to Alfred Fagon – the first statue of a black person in Bristol. In June 2020, the statue was damaged by a corrosive substance, believed to be bleach

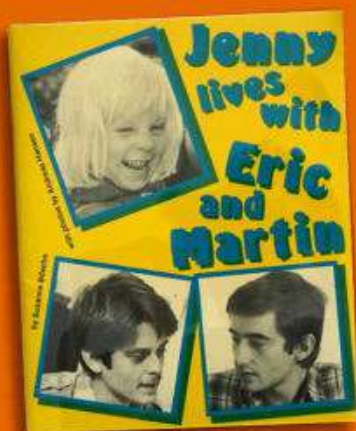


In the summer of 2021, a revival of Alfred Fagon's play *The Death of a Black Man*, starring Nickcolia King-N'da, Natalie Simpson and Toyin Omari-Kinch, was met with acclaim

SOCIAL

“Section 28 galvanised activists into adopting creative and confrontational ways to fight back”

Matt Elton commends a powerful account of the impact of the 1988 legislation on a generation of gay people > page 85



BOOKS

**CHINA**

// Far from being dragged down by their ancient script, through the power of computers the Chinese were liberated by it //

Michael Wood praises a study of the evolution of one of the world's oldest languages > page 80

ROYAL

“George V was a very ‘ordinary’ character, pitted against extraordinary challenges”

Heather Jones on a biography of the king who steered Britain through WWI > page 84

WITCHCRAFT

“It’s a feast for those who wonder what it was actually like to be a colonist on the frontier”

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"The Georgian era was a time of experimentation and invention"

PENELOPE J CORFIELD speaks to Rhiannon Davies about her new study of the 18th century, which highlights both the triumphs and scandals of the age



Rhiannon Davies: The subtitle of your book is *The Deeds and Misdeeds of 18th-Century Britain*. Can we call the actions of the past "misdeeds"?

Penelope J Corfield: I certainly don't think, as historians, we should be patting the past on the head and saying, "Oh, this is the good old days", but neither should we criticise and pronounce: "These are the bad old days." We should be trying to look at the picture in the round and assess both what people thought at the time, and what we think now, looking back retrospectively.

Obviously, we have to allow that some standards change, but at the same time, just as in international law, we can say that some things are beyond the bounds of acceptable behaviour between fellow humans. The clear example of that is the trade in enslaved Africans that came to an end in the Georgian era. In 1789, the abolitionist and reform campaigner William Wilberforce made a wonderful speech in parliament saying that it wasn't a case of just blaming individuals directly involved in the process; we are all guilty, he said, because the whole of society is based on this trade.

Why did attitudes towards slavery change in the Georgian era?

I don't think we should praise the Georgians too much for abolition. I mean this in the sense that it took quite a long time for opinion to change, after quite a lot of education and effort from various groups, including the Quakers, who campaigned against the slave trade. And as the century went on, there were enormous numbers of local

pressure groups, societies, associations and campaigners who were trying to alert people to what was happening.

The abolitionists had all sorts of tactics, poems and pictures to change people's attitudes. There were graphic pictures of bodies stacked in the ships, and an abolitionist token featuring an enslaved man, his hands in manacles, appealing: "Am I not a man and a brother?"

Meanwhile, a poet called William Cowper wrote an interesting poem about ordinary people who continued to drink rum and eat sugar, knowing at the back of their minds that there might be an ethical problem attached to it, but they didn't consider it day to day because they liked their rum and sugar too much.

Eventually, Britain legislated to stop a trade over which the government had no

power – it didn't run the trade. So it was just asserting: "This cannot happen under our authority." Having taken that step, they then set the British navy to disrupt other traders and to police the high seas. The moment they got the slave trade abolished, the campaigners moved on to try to abolish slavery itself, which was a bigger issue. Again, they got that through, even though there were big problems in the way that they did it: for instance, generous compensation was paid to slave owners, but not to formerly enslaved people.

So there was a significant change in attitude, and it had taken an awful lot of campaigning to get public opinion – which at first was hostile or unaware – to swing into putting on the pressure so that eventually the government felt it had to act.

Colonisation is a key trend of the era. Do you think the Georgians intended to gain a formalised overseas empire with a British monarch as the emperor at its head?

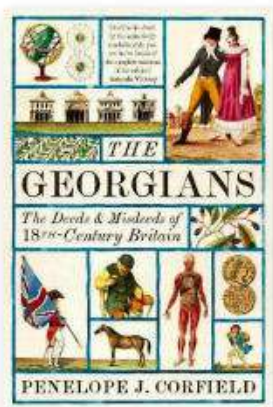
No, I don't. No British monarch was an emperor until 1876, when Victoria was made empress of India. At that time, there was a lot of debate in the House of Commons over whether she might be empress of Great Britain, and there was a lot of resistance to that because it was considered a more absolute form of rule, and they did not want that in Britain. So, no, there was no sort of masterplan.

That said, there was an expansionist mood. When the young George Vancouver arrived in Hawaii in the 1790s, he planted the flag and claimed Hawaii for the British government. But nobody told Britain, so nothing came from it. That example does show something about their mindset: Georgian explorers represented a confident and assertive power that didn't have any inhibitions, and they were quite ready to claim territory that they thought of as free and available.

The term "empire", initially, was used in terms of a commercial empire. There are songs about Britain's empire over the seas – the Britannia of 'Rule Britannia' rules the waves, but it isn't a worldwide empire. As the British expanded and the different forms of rule had to be organised, it did get more formalised. I certainly think that the British empire in India in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was far more formalised and socially repressive in terms of relationships between Indians and Britons than it was in the late 17th and early 18th centuries – not that it was perfect then, but it was much more free and easy. There was an enormous amount of inter-marriage between Britons and Indians, and a lot of migration to and fro.

You write that there was a sexualisation of British social life and culture in the Georgian period. What caused this?

There's a real lifting of the lid on people's sexual interests and behaviours, and it's to do with the freeing of the press, and the lifting of the



**The Georgians:
The Deeds and
Misdeeds of 18th-
Century Britain**

by Penelope J Corfield
(Yale University Press,
488 pages, £25)



PROFILE

Penelope J Corfield is a historian and lecturer. She is emeritus professor of history at Royal Holloway and president of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. Her previous books include *The Time and Shape of History* (Yale University Press, 2007).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
FRAN MONKS

licensing laws. No doubt people were interested in sexuality long before the 1690s, but when the press became freer it could be discussed more overtly and publicly, letting people become explicit about things they would have been hesitant about before. You can find the most amazing things in print in the 18th century – some of them would make modern readers blush.

The decline of the powers of the church courts was another big factor. Before the civil wars, these courts had tried to regulate people's moral behaviour. And although they didn't completely disappear, in the Georgian era their scope and their control over day-to-day business became minimal.

What were men's clubs and how did they fit into this story?

The 18th century was a great era of clubs and societies. They could cover absolutely everything – there were learned societies, sports societies, scientific research clubs. Some of them were dedicated to drinking and chatting about and enjoying sex. We have accounts, for example, that say a nude woman might be brought out, and they would be talking about sex and women and so forth.

I don't know whether they brought out nude men in the gay clubs, but we do know that there were specific spaces for gay men. There weren't really the same kinds of clubs for lesbians, as their actions were not so public.

How were attitudes to same-sex relationships changing?

Officially, not much. The laws were still very, very tough on this, but over time they were enacted with a little less rigour. Sentences of imprisonment or banishment were more common; although these still seem pretty tough, they were not as severe as hanging. Interestingly, many cases of known gay men in the 18th century did not end up in front of the law. The legal penalties were a great source of uncertainty and anxiety for everybody, because the law was – and this is one of the things that reformers point out – administered so arbitrarily, and was really unfair. An awful lot of people, including a number of famous people, weren't prosecuted.

In the case of legislation on sexual matters, it's notable that behaviour tends to change long before the law changes. The law waits quite a long time; the politicians are worried to rock the boat. And theologians, of course, are always strongly opposed. So if you look at the history of something through the legislation, it appears far harsher than it really was.

The era was rocked by a number of scandals, with some of them affecting the crown. What was it that made the relationship between George IV and his wife, Caroline of Brunswick, so controversial?

George IV is a wonderful instance for historians of how inappropriate behaviour in a role can put the whole institution at risk. Republican feeling in Britain was at its height in the 1830s, partly as a result of George's behaviour and failure to play by the rules publicly during and before his reign [1820–30]. Plenty of

// There's a real lifting of the lid on people's sexual interests and behaviours. You can find the most amazing things in print – some of them would make modern readers blush //

monarchs were playboys in secret, but he was flamboyantly and publicly so, and he was a spendthrift, which people didn't like either. His marriage to Caroline was never a happy one. From the first night, they both expressed displeasure with the other's person, so it didn't succeed at any level.

As time went on, their marriage deepened divisions within British society. The more traditional forces tended to rally behind the monarchs, as they were the head of state, head of the army and head of the church. However, those who were more radical and wanted change – the sort of people who would favour abolition of slavery, for example – were rallying against George, by supporting his wife. Caroline, who had an easy, open, friendly manner, became a public symbol of opposition to monarchy.

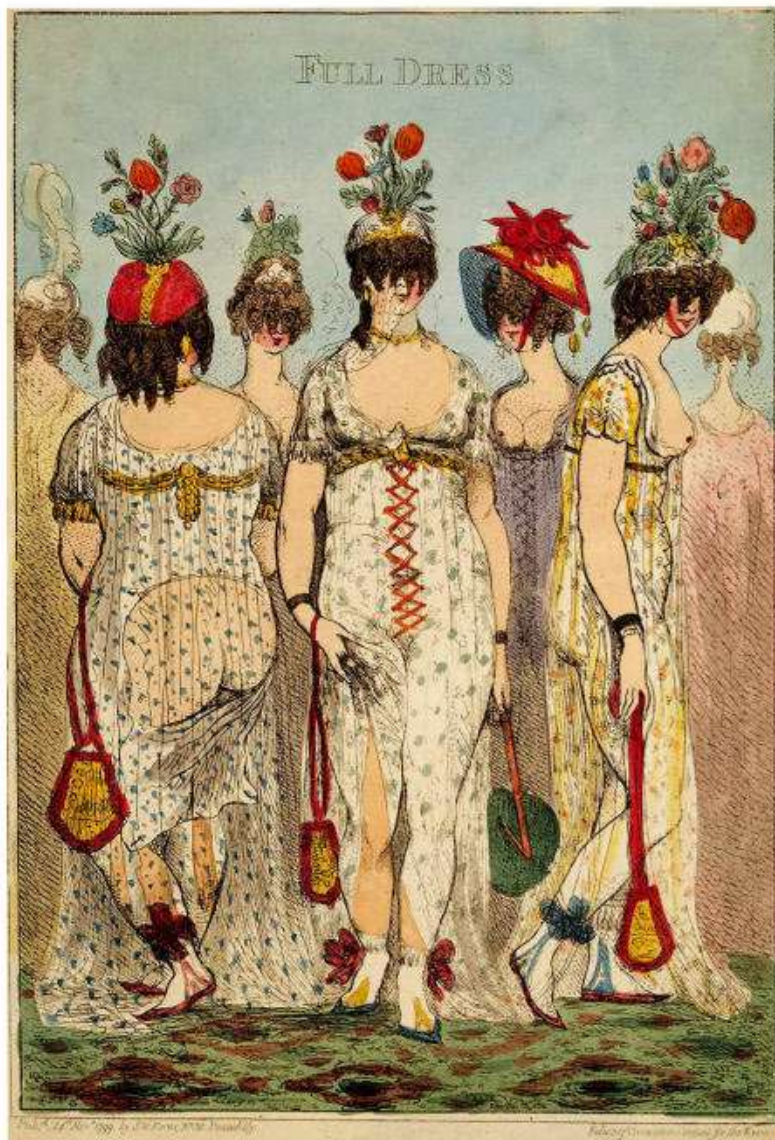
She garnered a huge amount of public support, as seen in the reaction to her death. She died in 1821, just after the king's coronation, when she had been denied entry to Westminster Abbey so hammered on the doors trying to get in and join the ceremony before being turned away. She'd asked to be buried back in Germany and there was

a cortège to take her coffin to the ports. It was decreed it should not pass through central London, for fear of huge crowds showing up in support. The crowds did indeed gather and were so outraged that people blocked the intended route and so forced the procession into the city.

Your book also explores the treatment of disabled people. How did that change in the Georgian era?

This was very much a liberal good cause, stemming in part from the increased education and literacy of the time. The Georgians suddenly realised that disabled people had all sorts of skills, and the right thing was to care for them and improve their education and allow each one to develop to their full potential.

This was in stark opposition to earlier times, when literature was full of jokes at the expense of disabled people. For instance, there were jokes that if you saw a blind man walking, you should direct him into a wall and then laugh as he hit himself. That was supposed to be funny. By the end of the 18th century, people would think that was an absolutely terrible thing to do. In the Georgian era, there were schools for the blind. But again, I wouldn't say that all behaviour changed just like that – it's not just a simple progress story.



This satirical print from 1799 reflects the sexualisation of the Georgian era. "When the press became freer, sexuality could be discussed more overtly and publicly," says Penelope J Corfield



Georgian gentlemen relax at their club, c1784. The period saw a proliferation of clubs and societies, with some dedicated to learning and others to sex and alcohol

Also changing were attitudes towards the classes of society. How was the Gin Craze of the 1730s and the 1740s incorporated into the class debate?

The Gin Craze was partly a product of successful agriculture, because grain was cheap and therefore gin was cheap. So it wasn't that people suddenly all let their hair down and began drinking gin in unprecedented numbers. This was an era, by the way, when people didn't drink much water because water wasn't cleansed – that was something again that was gradually being worked on in the 18th century – but they used to drink beer and gin and, in the case of the upper classes, wine. When gin became cheap, consumption of it spread like wildfire. Eventually, they had to bring in regulation of gin shops and raise the excise to control it.

The craze led to accusations that the poor were forgetting to work, forgetting their duty, and forgetting hierarchy by not acknowledging their betters. And, worse still, women and servants were taking to drinking gin. It's quite an interesting episode, both for the history of consumption and the history of social attitudes. It's also part of this longer shift between talking of a society in terms of ranks and degrees and clearly graded hierarchies, into a looser, more general language of class. That is often thought to start in the 19th century, but that's not true: I've chased it well back throughout the 18th century. For a long period, terms for both ranks and classes were used side by side, but gradually, a looser concept of class emerged.

I would stress that one of the early ideas of class was that classes might co-operate; they weren't necessarily viewed in a Marxist sense of class conflict. Yet over time, rather like the Indian empire, this became more formalised and class turned into a source of oppression.

The Georgian era is noted for its highwaymen and smugglers. Why do you think that many people today romanticise these figures, rather than viewing them as criminals?

Some of them were quite charming, but in my view it's because of historical distance. People love a rogue at a distance. When we read that Horace Walpole was stopped outside London and robbed of his

fob watch by a gentlemanly highwayman who quoted some Latin at him, that all seems quite charming. But of course, today, we wouldn't like it if we were held up on the A30 and robbed as we were trying to drive into London.

How did the Georgian people themselves feel about their era? Did they think that they were living through a golden age, or a time of decline?

I've found about 700 instances of people from the 18th century writing in their diaries and letters: "This is an age of, or a century of x, y or z." One example of the sort of thing I mean can be found in the intimate diary of Thomas Turner, a Georgian shopkeeper. If things were going wrong, he would write something like: "Oh, what terrible times we live in. The nation's in decay and everything is going to the dogs." But then a few days later, he'd been in a happier frame of mind and maybe reading some improving book and would say something along the lines of: "Ah, what an era of light and progress we live in."

There's a broad distinction between the optimists and the pessimists, but over time the optimistic narrative came to the fore. The power of Britain's global trade was encouraging; Britain was triumphing in war, especially after 1815, and there was a lot of literature of self-congratulation. There was also the spread of literacy, the spread of learning. There were scientific discoveries – Newton, Faraday, the first steam engine – and people were tremendously aware that they were living through a time of experimentation and invention.

These innovations are, of course, the source of some of our major problems today. This was when the first intensive use of fossil fuels began, which has had huge ramifications on climate change – though if we could transport the Georgians to the 21st century, many would likely be involved in debates about climate change and how we can slow it.

The Georgians were always debating their deeds and misdeeds, and trying to get a grip on them. It was such a dynamic time. **H**

MORE FROM US

Listen to an extended version of this interview with Penelope J Corfield on our **podcast** at historyextra.com/podcast



Tied to technology

A propaganda poster showing a Chinese man operating a typewriter. It wasn't until the arrival of computers that the Chinese script could really be brought into the modern age

CHINA

Coded language

MICHAEL WOOD praises a pioneering study of the transformation of Chinese script, and how this helped fuel the growth of the nation into one of the world's superpowers



Kingdom of Characters by Jing Tsu

Penguin, 336 pages, £20

I remember my astonishment when I first saw a Chinese colleague using her QWERTY keyboard to write Chinese

characters. Her speed was incredible. When she clicked on any letter, she initiated an algorithm based either on a letter's phonetic sound or root shape: a predictive text where

the algorithm guessed what she was looking for using the Pinyin Romanization. Here was a glimpse of the future. And it was Chinese. *Kingdom of Characters* tells how the script reached this point, and it is a fantastic story.

By the dawn of the 20th century, the conventional wisdom was that China would have to abandon its character-based system of writing and embrace the alphabet in order to move into the modern world and be a part of global trade, learning and technological progress. The alphabet, it was said, was the *sine qua non* of the Enlightenment – the conceptual technology at the bedrock of western science. But was it? Today, China is an IT and AI giant, and the Chinese script a world script.

This book is a delight: eye-opening and illuminating. It should be read by anyone who wants to understand the relationship between Chinese script and civilisation, and indeed anyone who is keen to learn more about the rise of China today. Most of all, it's a cracking good read, a brilliant story packed with pioneers, inventors and visionaries who should take their place alongside the heroes of Bill Bryson's wonderful *A Short History of Nearly Everything*. And, of course, it has many larger than life characters.

No civilisation has taken writing as seriously as China. It's a badge of honour for a politician to write beautiful calligraphy. Mao's unorthodox "energetic" hand still

adorns the rocks of Mount Tai, as well as countless public monuments and the masthead of the *People's Daily* newspaper. When the Chinese talk of "this culture of ours", one key is what they call "Han script".

The script is pictographic. The oldest continuously used in the world, it first appeared in the 13th century BC, when early forms of the characters were carved on the so-called Shang oracle bones. Adapting and changing over the next three millennia, it's part of the way Chinese people think. By the time of the Kangxi Dictionary in 1716, there were 47,000 signs. Perhaps a quarter are still in use today, and children learn about 2,000 by the time they are 12, while an educated person is said to know around 8,000.

In the modernisation debates of the 19th century, which Jing Tsu explores in her book, it was assumed the script would have to go. So cumbersome was it that until not so long ago, it was easier to cut a book on wood blocks rather than use metal print type. In 1907, the educator Li Shizeng, citing the theory of evolution, said "the primitive should be got rid of". And after the May 1919 New Culture Movement (which criticised traditional Chinese ideas), it became an imperative: the writer Lu Xun said, "unless the script is thrown out, China will die."

But some thought otherwise. The first Chinese typewriter was invented in 1916, although with 4,000 characters it was impractical for mass use. In the 1920s and 30s, librarians and scientists tried other ways of devising better library card classifications, phone books and filing systems – unaware that computers were round the corner – but it was with the communist revolution that real progress was made.

Having contemplated an alphabetic script, Mao set up a committee on script reform. Nothing comparable had been attempted before in the history of the world. The committee was meant to establish a simplified base script of about 2,200 characters. They introduced a new standardised phonetic system using the Roman alphabet and based on the common speech of Beijing Mandarin. Pinyin – Chinese in simplified Latin script – was the first stage in the transformation of China.

Then came computers. One of the heroes of Tsu's engrossing story is the scientist engineer Zhi Bingyi, who spent the Cultural Revolution as a cleaner, during which time he invented the coding method used to translate human-made brushstrokes into a system that could be entered digitally into a computer. (Denied pen and paper, he worked out his ideas with a stolen pen on the lid of a matte ceramic teacup, wiping out his work each day.) Released to a lowly job, it took two more years to flesh out his idea of using the first

letter of Pinyin spelling to access the index of signs. Zhi introduced his "On-Sight system for Chinese characters" in 1978, the first year of Deng Xiaoping's economic "reform and opening up". On 19 July, the *Shanghai Wen-hui Daily* announced: "The Chinese script has entered the Computing Machine!"

The timing could not have been better. Zhi's code made it possible to use Chinese characters in western computers. It was a revolutionary breakthrough, which underpinned Deng's reforms – his "four modernisations". From then on, things exploded. The computer pioneer Wang Xuan solved the issue of data compression. By 2000, China had full technological parity with the west. The digital sinosphere was ready to enter the global system.

Today, with any QWERTY keyboard laptop, the Chinese Input Method can be used to

// Far from being dragged down by their ancient script, computers both liberated the Chinese and kept them in touch with their Bronze Age roots //

write Chinese script, even classical. Seventy years ago, who would have even dreamed it? Far from their ancient script dragging them down, computers have liberated the Chinese and kept them in touch with their Bronze Age roots.

Tsu tells this story with colourful anecdotes, vivid scene setting, and great learning worn lightly. The big strength of her work is its feel for the lives of the key actors in the drama, which make the narrative unexpectedly gripping for such a potentially difficult subject. And needless to say, as a work written in English, it tells a tale most of us will never have heard before.

And we should all know this story, made possible through innovators who – in often incredibly difficult circumstances – laid the foundations for China to grow into the superpower it now is. Combining scholarship with exciting historical narrative, this book is an original take on one of modern history's most momentous transformations. **H**

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Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. His latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2021)

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Hana Videen on studying Old English

"When we study history, we often focus on events and individual people. By looking at history through language you gain a different perspective.

If it's a language you are familiar with, you might even be able to identify more with the people and society behind that text. And looking beyond the source's narrative can tell you so much more about the daily lives of those who lived at that time."



Tom Morris on a strange 1856 murder in a Dublin railway station

"This was a really mysterious case. The victim was found dead in his office, surrounded by piles of gold and silver coins amounting to well over £1,000: a huge sum at the time. Strangely, the door was also locked from the inside. The complicated police investigation culminated in a spectacular trial. From starting off as a murder mystery, the case transformed into a courtroom drama."



Tessa Dunlop on the Auxiliary Territorial Service

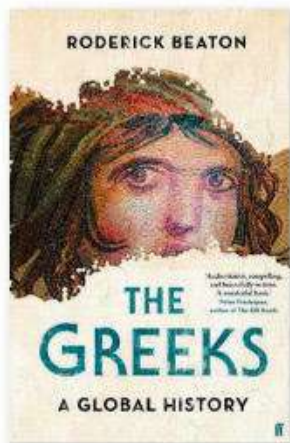
"Some people were aware we were going to need women in the Second World War. At the same time, society more widely was in denial about that fact. *Woman's Own* wrote that while many men took up their posts in the war, women should remain at theirs, meaning 'by the kitchen sink, if you please'. It took society a while to wake up, but by 1943 the ATS became the bricks and mortar behind the war effort."



ANCIENT

What makes a Greek?

MICHAEL SCOTT enjoys an informed and entertaining journey through the history of Greek-speaking people, but takes issue with the framing of the book



The Greeks: A Global History
by Roderick Beaton
Faber, 608 pages, £25

Philip of Macedon – father of Alexander the Great – was famously victorious in the Olympic chariot race of 356 BC. The

path to victory was not without its speed-bumps, though, among them a disagreement over whether Philip was Greek enough to participate in the games at all. He definitely spoke the language, but only Greek athletes were accepted.

The question here is what makes someone part of a community – and the Macedonian/Greek debate is one that has rumbled on through the centuries. In Roderick Beaton's magnificent new gallop through well over 3,000 years of history, the "Greeks" of the title are defined as those who speak the Greek language. But, as Philip's case shows and as Beaton himself explores in the book, speaking the language has not always been accepted as proof of Greekness. So it is a pity that, despite being a nuanced and engaging analysis of the various peoples who have spoken Greek, and of their changing fortunes, the book is packaged as offering "the story of a culture". This means equating speaking Greek with *being* Greek – and even Beaton sometimes slips into calling these myriad different peoples simply "Greeks".

That is a shame, because what this book does superbly is demonstrate that using the Greek-language-speaking criterion muddies the waters of what it is to be a community with a shared identity, or a "culture". Greek speakers have been part of a plethora of cultures, empires, religions and, most recently, nations and countries. As Beaton points out, at times this has led Greek speakers to decline to be known as Greeks, such as the Christian Greek speakers of the Eastern Roman empire, who referred to themselves as Romaioi (Romans). Equally, as he highlights, there have been periods when non-Greek speakers profoundly shaped the world in which Greek speakers lived: the rulers of the



History maker Basil II, "the Bulgar Slayer", defeats the Bulgarian army at Balathista in 1014. Four years later, he visited Athens – making him the only Byzantine emperor to ever go to the Greek capital

majority of Greek speakers from 1204 to 1923, for example, did not speak Greek.

That problem aside, I thoroughly enjoyed this book. As Beaton states, the Greek language boasts a continuous written tradition stretching back over three millennia. As such, the book delves into some of the greatest works of literature ever written, and deftly places these within the contexts of the worlds that created them. Greek history is so often divided into "ancient", "Byzantine" and "modern", as if they were unconnected stories, so it is a joy to have that history stitched back

together by someone with such an extraordinary global range of knowledge.

Out of that come the real jewels of Beaton's book: moments in which we see the language, culture, history and achievements of one period engaging actively with those of another. My favourite is the sketch of how, in 1018, Basil II "the Bulgar Slayer" – who ruled as emperor of Byzantium from Constantinople (now Istanbul) – did something no other Byzantine emperor had ever done or would do again: he went to Athens. There, in the Parthenon, built more than 1,500 years earlier as a pagan temple to Athena and long since converted into a Christian church, he offered thanks for his victories to the mother of God.

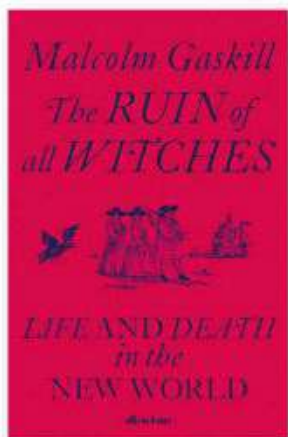
Following the speaking of the Greek language is a great way to tell the history of the wider Mediterranean and western Asian world, and this book does that brilliantly, marred only by the lingering elision between it being the history of a language and the history of a culture. **H**

Michael Scott is professor in classics and ancient history at the University of Warwick

// Greek history is often divided into 'ancient', 'Byzantine' and 'modern', as if unconnected, so it is a joy to have that history stitched back together //

Cursed lives

MARION GIBSON recommends an evocative deep-dive into a witchcraft trial that rocked 17th-century New England



The Ruin of All Witches: Life and Death in the New World
by Malcolm Gaskill
Allen Lane, 336 pages, £20

In February 1651, in the little settler town of Springfield, Massachusetts, Jonathan

Taylor woke in terror in the middle of the night. “Snakes!” he exclaimed to his perplexed wife. In a dream or vision that had seemed to Jonathan wholly real, snakes slithered towards him as he lay in bed, bit him on the forehead and spoke the word “death”. Jonathan fell into a malaria-like fever and, pretty soon, he joined a crowd of fellow townspeople accusing the brick-maker Hugh Parsons and his troubled wife, Mary, of witchcraft. *The Ruin of All Witches* is the story of Hugh and Mary’s trial, their lives before being accused, the tragic breakdown of their relationship, and their eventual fate.

Malcolm Gaskill’s telling of the Parsons’ story is evocative right from the start. With the “heart-thumping panic” and “skin-prickle of being watched” on the first page the reader is drawn in and excited in both body and mind. We feel the breath-stopping heat of the Connecticut River Valley summers, and we hear the squeak and crackle of crisp snow in winter. His commentary is acute, too, on the emotional landscape of witchcraft accusation, making readers feel the tensions between fear, selfishness and guilt in allegations that colonists made against former friends and neighbours. The wretched Hugh and Mary were already suffering from their own problems of chronic poverty, overwork and mental illness; on top of these were piled claims that they had caused hallucinations, injured neighbours and even bewitched the minister’s children – accusations that could lead to their executions.

Gaskill has always been good at painting the big social picture that forms the backdrop to witchcraft trials, as well as the moments of high drama. Sometimes, I’ve wanted more information

about the individuals involved in those trials, and this book provides that rich detail in bulk with house-by-house maps of the 17th-century settlement of Springfield; ample quotations from scattered manuscript sources; and careful descriptions of the interiors of homes, the processes of farming, and the smells, sights and sounds of contemporary life of that age.

It’s a feast for those who wonder what it was actually like to be a colonist living in a wooden cabin on the frontier, thousands of miles from home, surrounded by a new land and its understandably hostile indigenous peoples. We feel the Springfield settlers’ dreads and petty anxieties. The book offers the necessary compassion to its cast of characters too: people who miserably did a series of great wrongs while trying to do right.

There’s also a very readable account of the archival trail that Gaskill followed in 2015 and after in his efforts to find the story, with all its vital personal details, moving from depressing motel room to hallowed library to workaday town hall. And we learn more about the Parsons’ witchcraft case and the history of the bleak modern city of Springfield itself because of his exertions. At the end of this book, Gaskill declares his hope that his work has restored some of the city’s past to its people. Certainly, he’s given a valuable gift to every reader of history. **H**

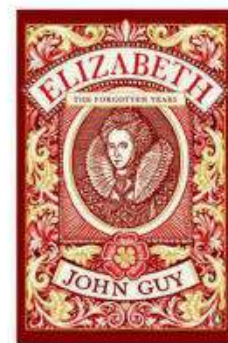
Marion Gibson is professor of Renaissance and magical literatures at the University of Exeter. Among her books is *Witchcraft: The Basics* (Routledge, 2018)



Witch hunt An engraving of three witches. Malcolm Gaskill’s book explores the tragedy of witch trials

YOU RECOMMEND

In light of the platinum jubilee, we asked our Twitter followers which books on **royal history** they would recommend...



@HelenPins

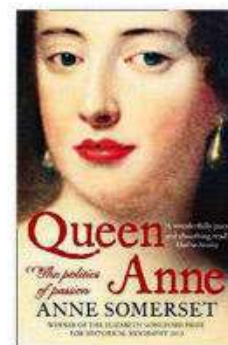
Elizabeth: The Forgotten Years by John Guy. It’s about the twilight of a reign, getting behind the myth and propaganda of “Gloriana”. Probably my favourite book on

Elizabeth, because it’s all slipping away from her in a time of national crisis.



@PamC

Crown and Sceptre: A New History of the British Monarchy from William the Conqueror to Elizabeth II by Tracy Borman.



@stevie

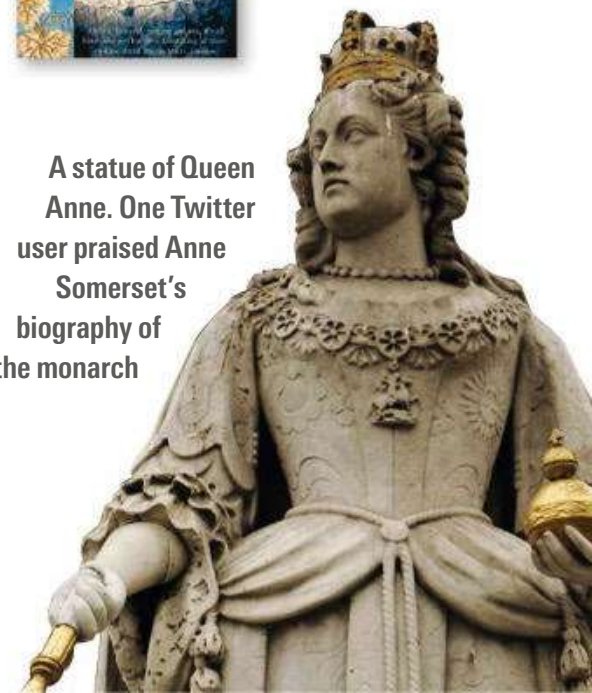
Possibly a bit left field, but I really liked *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* by Anne Somerset. It’s very interesting to see how the historiography of her has changed.



@DrRJWarren

I found Antonia Fraser’s *Marie Antoinette* absolutely compelling when I read it years ago.

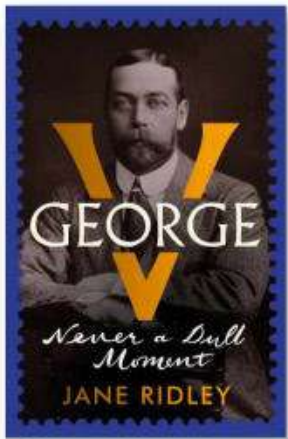
A statue of Queen Anne. One Twitter user praised Anne Somerset’s biography of the monarch



ROYAL

A very ordinary king

HEATHER JONES is impressed by a new biography that reveals insights about the wartime monarch's impressive political achievements, complex personal life and family failings



George V: Never a Dull Moment

by Jane Ridley
Chatto, 576 pages, £30

King George V reigned from 1910 to 1936 – turbulent years that witnessed the First World War, the Russian Revolution,

the extension of the suffrage to women, the rise of fascism and the Great Depression. He oversaw the monarchy's modernisation, its embrace of democracy, its engagement with Labour and its support for imperial reform as the British empire became the Commonwealth. As a wave of other European dynasties collapsed, he engineered the British crown's survival, helped by his astute and pragmatic wife, Queen Mary.

Yet, as Jane Ridley points out in this riveting new book, the previous biographers of George emphasised his pastimes – such as stamp-collecting or shooting a startling number of birds (he shot 11,006 in the 1896–97 season alone) – over his political achievements or his enormous popularity, epitomised by the outpouring of public support at his silver jubilee in 1935. Ridley shows where the true drama of this reign lies: George V was not dull, but a very “ordinary” character, pitted against extraordinary historic challenges that he surmounted against the odds.

Ridley brings new insight to George's personal life, too, through unparalleled access to his private letters and excellent use of the archives of two previous royal biographers, Harold Nicolson and James Pope-Hennessy. She has a sharp eye for the ludicrous, particularly the excesses of the Victorian and Edwardian courts. For instance, Mary required “40 outdoor dresses, 15 ballgowns and five tea gowns” made for her wedding and, ahead of a trip to India in 1905, had to spend a full week trying on her tour outfits.

Ridley also highlights both George and Mary's inner scars. Mary's obsession

// As a wave of other European dynasties collapsed, George V engineered the British crown's survival, helped by his astute wife, Mary //

Devoted union

George (here still Prince of Wales) and his wife, Mary, c1909. In her new biography, Jane Ridley reveals the inner workings of the marriage, sharing some of the love letters they wrote to each other

with collecting objets d'art was a reaction to the childhood loss of her original family collections when her debt-stricken parents sold off the family silver and pretty much everything else. Meanwhile, aged 26, George suffered a bout of near fatal typhoid; he had just recovered enough to leave his bed when his beloved older brother, Prince Eddy, died suddenly from syphilis in January 1892, leaving him unexpectedly heir to the throne. Dutiful George then had to marry Prince Eddy's erstwhile fiancée, Mary, in what was effectively an arranged marriage.

A strength of this biography is its new coverage of how that marriage worked. Ridley traces how George and Mary, unable to speak of their feelings, wrote them down instead. A devoted marital love slowly grew between them: “We will have a better kiss when we are alone in the house,” George wrote to Mary ahead of one reunion in Scotland. Mary emerges here as central to the survival of the monarchy, yet marriage did not make George tactful: upon learning that his mother-in-law had died, his first response was to complain: “It is very hard on me: as it knocks all my shooting on the head.”

The rift with his eldest son would prove George's “greatest failure”. Both Mary and George emerge as well-meaning parents who adored their children, but were utterly ignorant of their basic emotional developmental needs. Fearful of confronting a bullying nanny, Mary allowed the woman to alienate her from her eldest infants. The result was a dysfunctional relationship between both parents and their eldest son, the future Edward VIII, whose abdication crisis has long overshadowed his father's forgotten successes.

Well-researched and entertaining, this book offers a valuable reassessment of a king who shaped modern Britain. **H**

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Heather Jones is professor in modern and contemporary European history at University College London. Her latest book is *For King and Country: The British Monarchy and the First World War* (Cambridge, 2021)

➤ Turn to page 32 to read Heather's nomination of King George V as Britain's greatest monarch



SOCIAL

Pride and prejudice



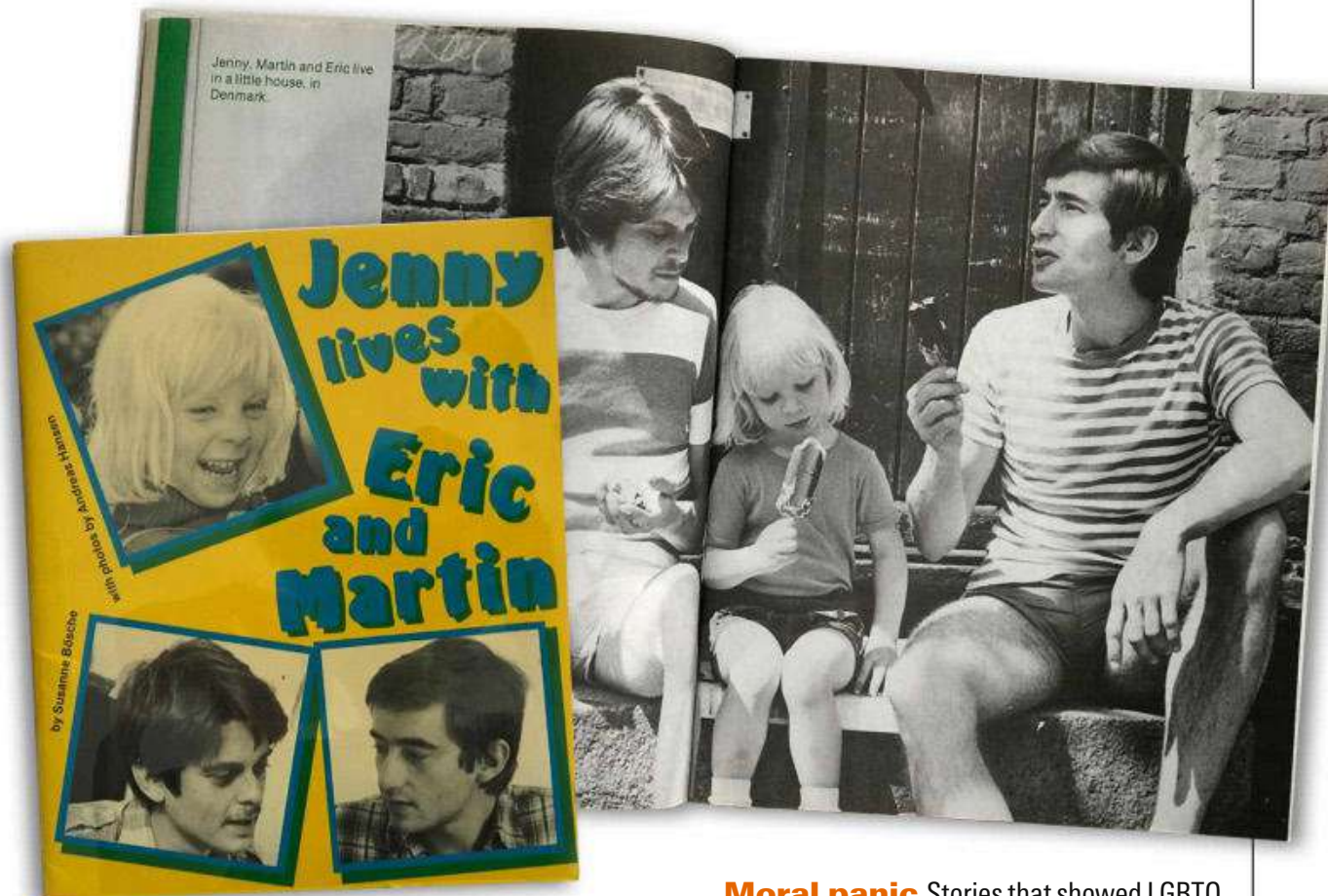
Outrageous! The Story of Section 28 and Britain's Battle for LGBT Education
by Paul Baker
Reaktion Books,
336 pages, £15.99

Tucked away in an otherwise unremarkable

1988 Local Government Act, Section 28 became one of the most infamous pieces of legislation of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. It banned local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales from "intentionally promoting homosexuality" or from schools promoting "homosexuality as a pretended family relationship".

As author and Lancaster University professor Paul Baker sets out in this vivid look at the legislation and its effects, Section 28 represented "the culmination of the moral panic around homosexuality that took place over the 1980s". He sets this panic into its broader historical context, charting the long-burning cultural and political embers ignited when a London school stocked *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, the tale of a girl's life with her father and his boyfriend.

While nobody was successfully prosecuted under Section 28, Baker movingly recounts the more pernicious ways in which it affected



the lives of gay people. For pupils, the silence or, worse, prejudice could have long-lasting effects on the way they viewed themselves. Teachers felt its impact in limiting their ability to teach sex education and prevent homophobic abuse, as did LGBTQ support organisations, which were forbidden from meeting or had funding withdrawn. Yet the legislation also galvanised activists – some of whom are interviewed here – into adopting creative and confrontational ways to fight back.

Baker's chatty, tart tone and personal asides serve to throw the heady extremes of a not-so-distant era into even sharper relief. Indeed, it wasn't until 2000 that Section 28 was repealed in Scotland,

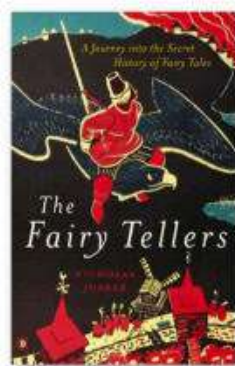
Moral panic Stories that showed LGBTQ families, such as *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*, sparked a political response that led to Section 28. Paul Baker's new book delves into the legislation and its consequences

followed by England and Wales three years later. Baker explores why it took the New Labour government so long to act, and the extent to which things have since changed in schools and wider society. It's a broadly optimistic end to a lively take on the power of community and the intersection between the political and the personal. **H**

Matt Elton is deputy editor of *BBC History Magazine*

CULTURAL

Forgotten stories



The Fairy Tellers: A Journey into the Secret History of Fairy Tales
by Nicholas Jubber
John Murray, 336 pages, £20

The title alone of *The Ocean of the Streams of Story*, a vast 11th-century

compendium of fantastical Indian tales, is enough to kindle the imagination. Structured as a recursive loop of fluid and overlapping tales, the experience of reading *The Ocean* is, according to Nicholas Jubber, not all that dissimilar to the "interconnecting, narrative promiscuity" and "relentless polyphony" of

surfing the world wide web. Though the sheer raw imaginative capacity of such collections may be enough to transfix us, *The Fairy Tellers* reminds us of a truth hidden in plain sight whenever we approach classic tales of the fantastic: that, while these tales are in one sense timeless and their forms may have changed over the years, they still have named human authors.

Jubber's book is a captivating journey into the history of the fairy tale, with a particular focus on the people who first told or first committed to writing some of the best-loved stories. In some cases, such as Hans Christian Andersen, their identities are well known. But how many have heard of Giambattista Basile, Hanna Dyab, Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, Dortchen Wild, Ivan Khudiakov or Somadeva?

These people brought us numerous beloved tales, yet their own stories remain

widely untold. In some cases, such as the Russian Khudiakov, their lives were almost as extraordinary as the tales they wrote down. Meanwhile, others quietly collaborated with more famous names to bring us stories of great beauty.

The Fairy Tellers is interwoven with Jubber's own retellings of some of these stories – by necessity, a limited selection. This important book is a reminder that stories need authors, and that even the most archetypal of tales must be channelled through particular human imaginations. The stories, of course, now belong to us all – but we should still know where they came from. **H**

Francis Young is a historian and writer. His latest book is *Witchcraft and the Modern Roman Catholic Church* (Cambridge, 2022). You can read his feature on folklore on page 64

A collage of various images including soldiers, a red flag, and a target symbol, with a large orange banner across the middle.

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FICTION

The Language of Food

by Annabel Abbs

(Simon & Schuster, 416 pages, £14.99)

**Food, glorious food**

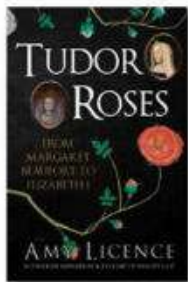
When aspiring poet Eliza Acton was told that her future lay in cookery books, not sonnets, she was at first dismayed. But – despite her lack of culinary skills – she wrote the book her publisher wanted. With the help of her assistant Ann Kirby, their recipes became a Victorian sensation. Told through the voices of both women, Annabel Abbs weaves a compelling tale of friendship, freedom and food.

TUDOR

Tudor Roses: From Margaret Beaufort to Elizabeth I

by Amy Licence

(Amberley, 448 pages, £25)

**Flowers and thorns**

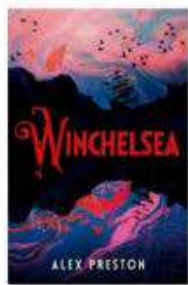
Rather than focusing on the dynasty's men, Amy Licence turns her gaze to the ladies of the Tudor era. We meet the women who wielded power, from Margaret Beaufort, the matriarch whose manoeuvrings helped place her son Henry Tudor on the throne, to Elizabeth I, the Virgin Queen who ruled for 44 years. Licence also profiles lesser-known characters, such as Henry VIII's sisters and their children.

FICTION

Winchelsea

by Alex Preston

(Canongate, 352 pages, £14.99)

**Lethal currents**

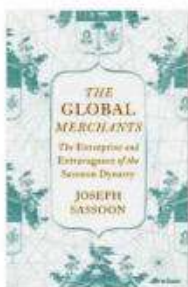
In 1742 Goody Brown, a teenage resident of the English smuggling town of Winchelsea, finds herself in freefall after her adopted father is killed by a group of his supposed friends. Desperate for vengeance, Goody and her brother Francis swell the ranks of a smuggling gang, facing stormy seas and deadly rogues. Freed from society's expectations, Goody also grapples with her unexpected thirst for danger.

GLOBAL

The Global Merchants: The Enterprise and Extravagance of the Sassoon Dynasty

by Joseph Sassoon

(Allen Lane, 448 pages, £30)

**Family fortunes**

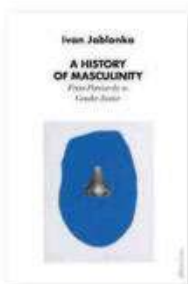
Beyond war poet Siegfried Sassoon, in the west relatively few people are familiar with the Sassoon family. But in the 19th century they were rivals to the Rothschilds in terms of their eye-watering wealth, which they earned through their sprawling commercial empire. Joseph Sassoon, from another branch of the family, charts the dynasty's fortunes, drawing for the first time on the Sassoons' coded archives.

SOCIAL

A History of Masculinity: From Patriarchy to Gender Justice

by Ivan Jablonka

(Allen Lane, 368 pages, £25)

**Man trouble**

"Masculine domination is one of the most universal characteristics of human societies," begins this vivid, opinionated take on centuries of gender relations. But what are the causes of this recurring imbalance, and what effect has it had on people within those societies? These are the questions at the heart of this thought-provoking, occasionally troubling, big history – which also offers up some possible futures.

CULTURAL

The Doctor's Garden: Medicine, Science and Horticulture in Britain

by Clare Hickman

(Yale, 288 pages, £30)

**Intellectual growth**

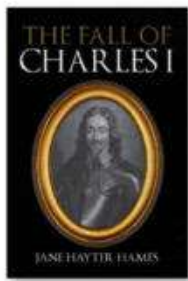
In the late 18th century, Dr John Coakley Lettsom established a garden in Surrey. Part botanic idyll, part storing house for plants he had discovered on his trips around the world, it was one of a number of sites of collection and learning established by medical practitioners at the time. This book explores those gardens, and the role that they played in the era's scientific developments.

ROYALTY

The Fall of Charles I

by Jane Hayter-Hames

(Amberley, 320 pages, £20)

**King and martyr?**

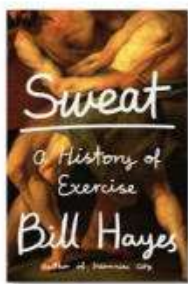
That none of the experts in our feature on Britain's greatest monarchs (page 20) nominated Charles I is, perhaps, not a huge surprise. But has his story's final, dramatic descent into civil war and execution obscured the more positive aspects of his reign and personality? This detailed biography profiles his life and times, as well as the key characters and ideas that contributed to his downfall.

SOCIAL

Sweat: A History of Exercise

by Bill Hayes

(Bloomsbury, 336 pages, £20)

**Activity tracking**

Melding memoir with history, this look at centuries of exercise spends a fair amount of its time on present-day anecdotes. Yet its musings on the work of Renaissance physician Girolamo Mercuriale reveal much about a pioneer of sports medicine. And a supporting cast including Plato and Jane Fonda helps bring to life the changes in a wide range of ways of keeping fit, from the ancient world to the 21st century. **H**

Changing times

Marian Brook (Louisa Jacobson) and Peggy Scott (Denée Benton) in *The Gilded Age*, a drama exploring the collision of old and new money in 19th-century New York City



ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: VISIT / WATCH / LISTEN / TASTE

By Jonathan Wright, Samantha Nott and Rhiannon Davies

94 EXPLORE... Ancient House Museum, Thetford

WATCH

High society

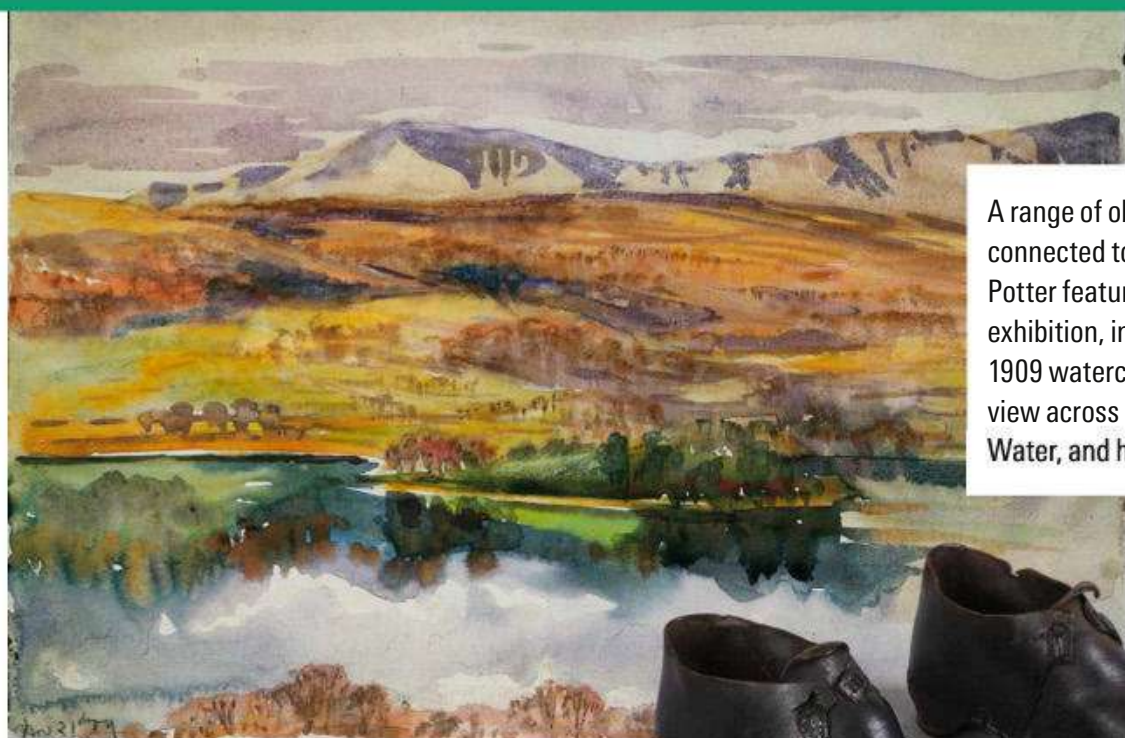
The late 19th century was a time of huge change in the US, particularly in those areas of the country undergoing industrialisation. Output boomed and, for a few ambitious and lucky souls, there were fortunes to be made. It was also a time when, at least in the upper echelons of east-coast communities, established members of high society collided with those busy getting rich.

This era provides the backdrop for the nine-part drama *The Gilded Age*, from *Downton Abbey* creator Julian Fellowes and writer Sonja Warfield. The story begins in 1882, when young Marian Brook (Louisa Jacobson) moves from rural Pennsylvania to New York following the death of her father. She lives in the city with her old-money aunts Agnes van Rhijn (Christine Baranski) and Ada Brook (Cynthia Nixon).

Marian gets caught up in a feud involving one of her aunts and her neighbours, robber-baron railroad tycoon George Russell (Morgan Spector) and his wife, Bertha (Carrie Coon), who represent new money. Another storyline centres on Marian's unlikely friendship with Peggy Scott (Denée Benton), an ambitious writer who recently finished her education at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia.

The Gilded Age

Sky Atlantic / Scheduled for Tuesday 25 January



A range of objects connected to Beatrix Potter feature in a new exhibition, including this 1909 watercolour of the view across Esthwaite Water, and her clogs



VISIT

Natural storyteller

Whimsical characters such as Peter Rabbit and Jemima Puddle-Duck have captured the hearts of children since they were created by Beatrix Potter in the early 20th century. Now, with an exciting collaboration between the V&A and the National Trust, Potter's life and characters are set to be celebrated once more.

More than 240 personal items will tell the story of Potter's life, from her childhood in London

to her almost accidental rise to stardom as an author, her relocation to the Lake District and her success as a sheep farmer. Her characters, too, are introduced through artworks from some of her most iconic books, and with drawings of the animals and landscapes that inspired them.

Beatrix Potter: Drawn to Nature

V&A, London / Opens 12 February / Booking recommended / vam.ac.uk

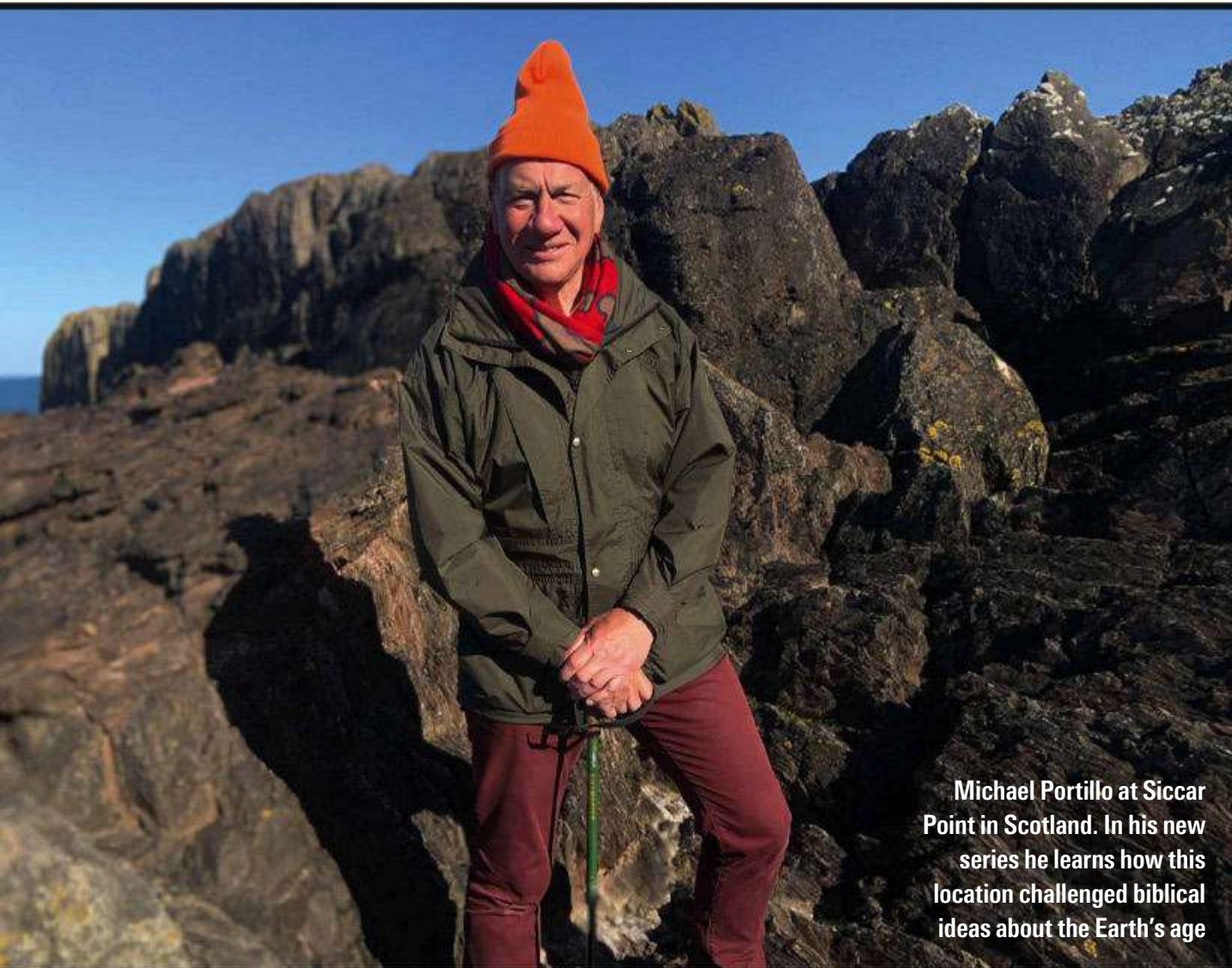
VISIT

For your eyes only

How exactly did Alan Turing and his Bletchley Park deciphering team crack the German Enigma code during the Second World War? Who belonged to Cold War-era spy rings in Britain, and how did they pass secrets to the Soviets? Find the answers to these questions and more at an exhibition (pictured below) devoted to all things espionage, coming to Bradford after successful runs in the Science Museum and Science and Industry Museum. Visitors can also head to the puzzle zone to put their codebreaking skills to the test.

Top Secret

National Science and Media Museum, Bradford / 11 February–5 June / Booking required / scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk



Michael Portillo at Siccar Point in Scotland. In his new series he learns how this location challenged biblical ideas about the Earth's age

WATCH

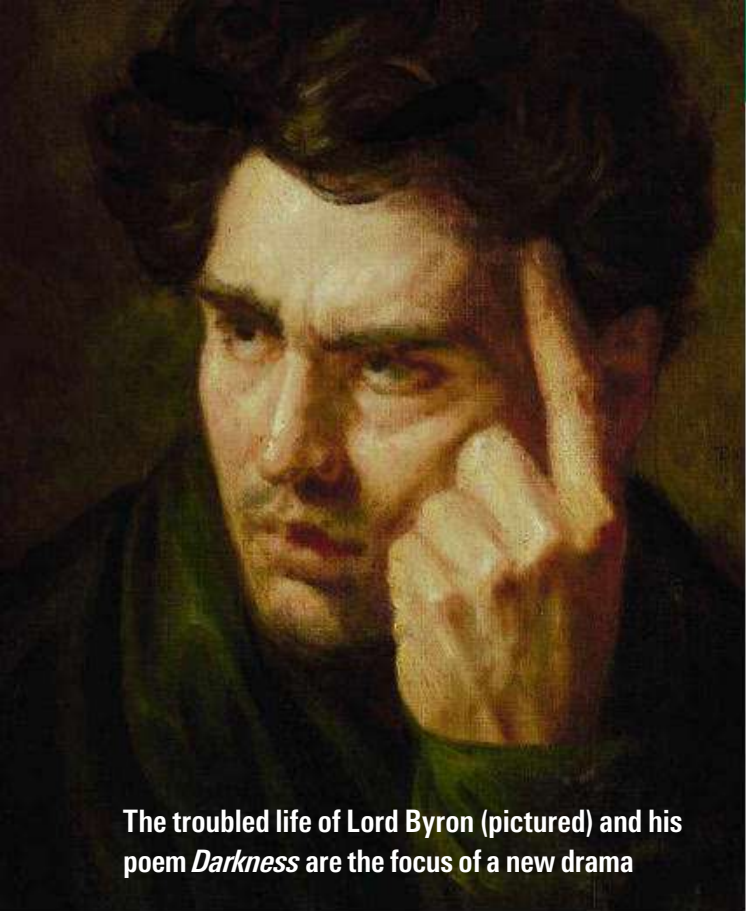
Back on the tracks

When *Great British Railway Journeys* was first broadcast back in 2010, few could have predicted that Michael Portillo would still be exploring Britain by train more than a decade later. Nevertheless, the return of the series in the New Year has become a TV schedule staple, well timed to remind us that we won't always be hunkering down for winter.

In this new spin off, Portillo's travels find him exploring the British coastline. The broadcaster begins in Scotland, visiting Siccar Point, where he sees rocks that helped overturn long-held beliefs about the age of the Earth; and Edinburgh, where he learns about the grisly murder of David Rizzio, private secretary of Mary, Queen of Scots, in the 16th century.

Great Coastal Railway Journeys

BBC Two / Expected to begin Monday 24 January



The troubled life of Lord Byron (pictured) and his poem *Darkness* are the focus of a new drama

LISTEN

Long, cold summer

In 1816, Lord Byron was in exile. In debt and beset by rumours that he had been conducting an incestuous affair with his half-sister, Augusta Leigh, he rented a mansion on the shores of Lake Geneva, the Villa Diodati.

But this was no escape to sunlit uplands. Following the eruption of Mount Tambora in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) in 1815, volcanic debris disrupted normal weather patterns, leading to food shortages in Europe and the so-called “year without a summer”.

The ominous atmosphere of these days was reflected in a poem Byron penned that July: *Darkness*, an apocalyptic story of the last man on Earth. New radio drama *Darkness*, written by Michael Symmons Roberts, interweaves the poem with scenes from Byron’s troubled life.

Alfred Enoch stars as Byron, while Ashley Margolis plays physician John Polidori, who accompanied Byron to Switzerland. Polidori subsequently wrote the first modern vampire tale, *The Vampyr* (1819), based on a fragment of a story that Byron came up with after proposing the horror-writing challenge that also inspired Mary Shelley to begin *Frankenstein*.

Darkness

BBC Radio 4 / Scheduled for Sunday 23 January

WEEKLY TV & RADIO

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HISTORY ON THE BOX

“Portraits are a powerful way to preserve the strength and humanity of the people at the heart of the history”



Director **SUNITI SOMAIYA** discusses her new documentary about Holocaust survivors who sat for portraits, and how their testimonies can become even more powerful through the medium of art

The programme features seven Holocaust survivors sitting for portrait artists. How did it come about?

We were invited to make the documentary to accompany an existing Royal Collections project [the portraits will be displayed at the Queen’s Gallery], and we jumped at the opportunity. These survivor stories are incredibly powerful and important. As someone with an interest in the arts, I found it fascinating to explore the creative responses to this chapter of our history.

The testimony of the survivors forms the central narrative of the film. They all have unique stories, but there are common elements in how their lives changed and the experiences they had in the camps and through to liberation. The stories of the artists, their sittings with the survivors, and the creation of their final portraits is interwoven with that testimony.

Do the seven sitters have similar emotional responses to the experiences they went through?

The emotional responses vary widely from sitter to sitter, but the one thing they have in common is their motivation and their message. Many find it extremely painful to recall what they and their families suffered at the hands of the Nazis. They do so because they feel it’s of vital importance to tell the world what happened to them and to the millions of others who didn’t survive. They urge us to learn from history, to never allow it to repeat itself, and to promote tolerance and understanding. “Don’t hate,” says one sitter. “We’re all human beings and deserve to be treated as such.” Now in their nineties, they waste no opportunity to get this message across.

What do portraits of survivors offer that photographs or interviews don’t?

One of the sitters pointed out that soon there will be no first-hand witnesses left.

The stories of the Holocaust will then be relegated to the history books, and text-book history has a habit of fading. Portraits, created by artists who have known the sitters and borne witness to their testimony, are a powerful way to preserve the strength, hope and humanity of the real people at the heart of the history.

There must be many moments that stay with you from talking to the survivors. Can you share some?

It was very harrowing but also an incredible privilege to hear these stories firsthand. All of the survivors participating in this project were children in the camps. One sitter, Manfred, shared his account of his mother’s suffering after his brother was killed by the SS. And of course there were occasions when sitters got upset during interviews; it just makes you realise how raw their trauma still is more than 70 years later. **H**

Survivors: Portraits of the Holocaust

is a BBC Two documentary for Holocaust Memorial Day, airing on 27 January



Artist Jenny Saville (left) and Holocaust survivor Zigi Shipper share their stories in a BBC documentary

HISTORY COOKBOOK



Suffrage angel cake was one of many recipes shared to promote the cause

TASTE

Suffrage angel cake (à la Kennedy)

Before women were given the vote in the US in 1920, suffragists published cookbooks packed with propaganda to help raise awareness of their cause. This recipe is adapted from one by Pittsburgh-based suffragist Eliza Kennedy in *The Suffrage Cook Book*.

Difficulty: 3/10

Time: 1.5 hours

INGREDIENTS

11 egg whites
140g plain flour
2 tbsp cornflour
300g caster sugar
1 heaped tsp cream of tartar
2 tsp vanilla essence
1 pinch salt

METHOD

1. Beat the egg whites until light, not stiff.
2. Gradually add the sugar to the mixture.
3. Fold in the sifted flour, cornflour, salt and cream of tartar; try not to over-mix. Then add the vanilla essence.
4. Pour the cake mixture into a well-greased tin.
5. Bake for approximately 40 minutes in an oven preheated to 190°C.
6. Remove the cake from the oven, turn the tin upside down and allow to cool on a wire rack. This will prevent the cake collapsing before it's cool.

Credit: Nina Martyris

VISIT

Avian art

From the majestic bald eagle to the common turkey, North America is home to a spectacular array of birds. In 1820, naturalist John James Audubon set out to paint every species on the continent for his ambitious book *Birds of America* (1827–38). It featured 435 life-sized prints of various birds, each coloured by hand, including images of at least five species that are now extinct.

This new exhibition delves into his magnificent work. Displays also consider Audubon's troubling legacy: the naturalist made money from owning enslaved people, and stole human skulls from a Texas battlefield to send to a doctor who was a proponent of race science.

Audubon's Birds of America

National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh /
12 February–8 May / nms.ac.uk



Barn owls, from John James Audubon's *Birds of America*. The book and its creator's complex legacy are explored in a new exhibition

WATCH

Changing man

It's a reflection of how long *Peaky Blinders* has been away from our screens that series six begins with a noticeably long recap of previous events. Suffice to say – with a warning for anyone catching up via streaming: there are mild spoilers ahead – we rejoin Birmingham gangster Tommy Shelby (Cillian Murphy) at his lowest ebb.

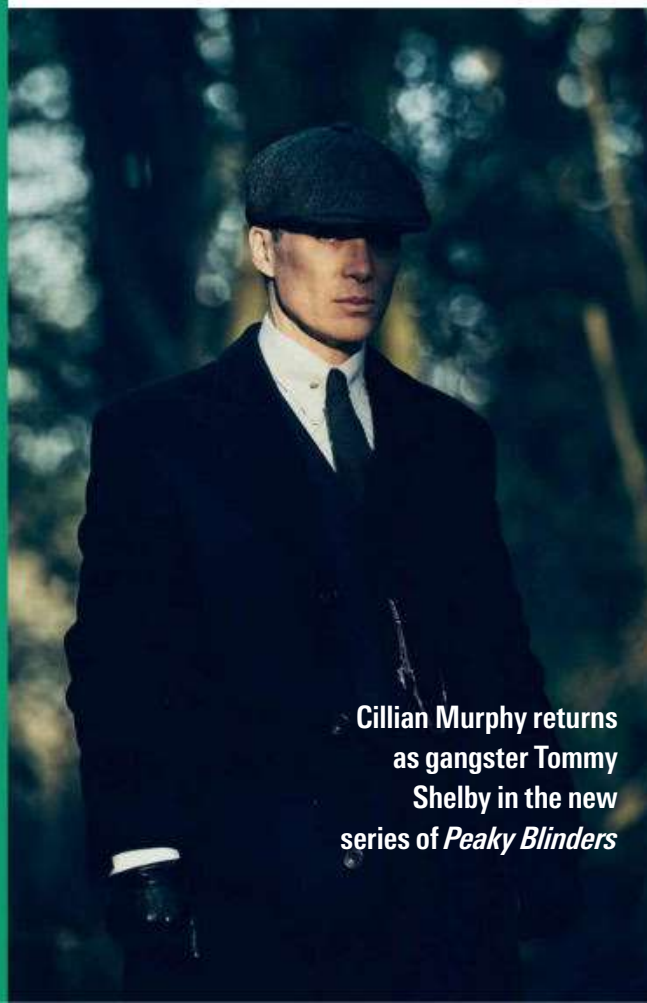
The trickster, the schemer, the cleverest man in the room – still he has proven unequal to the task of stopping Oswald Mosley. But why? What's gone wrong?

We soon get at least a partial answer, but don't expect creator Steven Knight to dwell too long on this revelation. Instead, in a series that's always had a restless quality reflecting in part its protagonist's inability to be at peace with himself, we soon jump ahead four years, into the 1930s. Prohibition is ending in the US, and Shelby spies a business opportunity. But is Tommy, scarred by so much that's gone before, playing a longer game?

The late Helen McCrory's Polly Gray is much missed but, following Covid-related production delays, *Peaky Blinders* is well and truly back.

Peaky Blinders

BBC One / Expected to air in February



Cillian Murphy returns as gangster Tommy Shelby in the new series of *Peaky Blinders*

SAM NOTT/BBC

Boscawen-Un Stone Circle in Cornwall. Druids may have gathered here in the Iron Age



VISIT

New arrivals

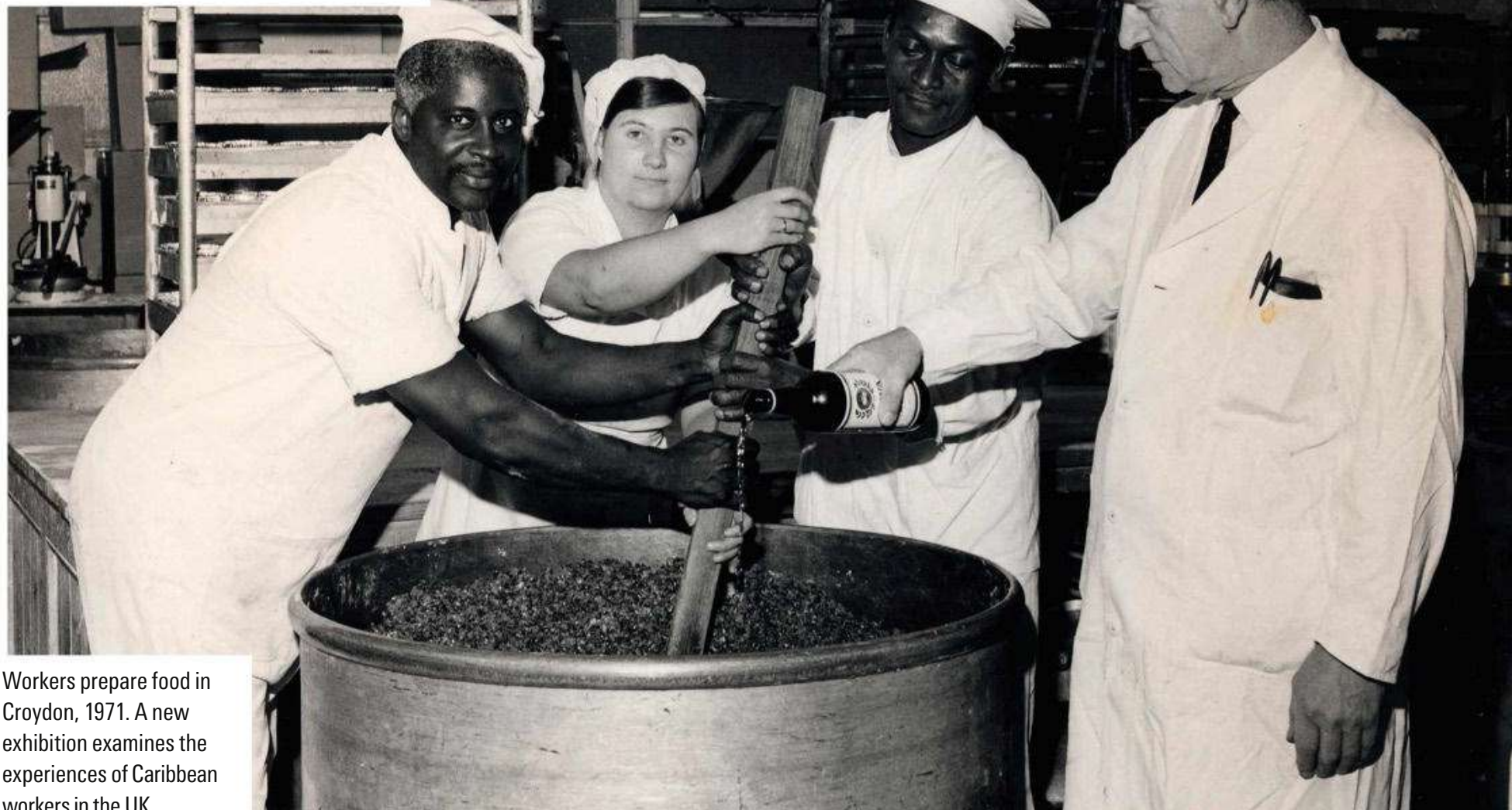
Postwar Britain, in dire need of labour, looked outwards to its colonies. Responding to the call, in the 1950s and 60s tens of thousands of people from the Caribbean came to the UK. Large numbers of them found work with London Transport as bus conductors or on the Underground.

Many struggled when they arrived, facing racism from fellow employees and landlords. But there were bright spots: new clubs such as the London Transport Caribbean Association were set up to help newcomers.

A new exhibition digs deeper into these immigrants' experiences and brings the story up to the present day, examining the wider influence of Caribbean culture on the UK.

Legacies: London Transport's Caribbean Workforce

London Transport Museum, London / Opens 11 February / Booking required / ltmuseum.co.uk



Workers prepare food in Croydon, 1971. A new exhibition examines the experiences of Caribbean workers in the UK

LISTEN

Emerging from the mist

Immediately pre-dating the Romanisation of the southern part of the island, the Iron Age in Britain lasted for close to 1,000 years. Yet many of us have only the sketchiest idea of what the tribal societies built by our predecessors of that period might have been like.

A new series of late-night show *The Essay* should help, gathering the reflections of various experts over 15 episodes to be broadcast through 2022. Highlights include the Australian writer Ilka Tampke discussing Boudicca, archaeologist Caradoc Peters detailing what life might have been like in pre-Christian Cornwall, and historian Ronald Hutton on the role of Druids in Iron Age Britain.

The Essay: Unearthing Britannia's Tribes

BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds / Begins Monday 17 January

► Turn to page 50 for Miles Russell's feature on the British tribes who defied Rome

WATCH

Culture shock

The best artists grapple with difficult ideas in their work, which inevitably leads them to tackle subjects that others would prefer were left well alone. But which art gets forbidden because of its themes, and why? How has this process worked down the years? And who gets to decide when an artist has entered a no-go area?

These are questions tackled by Mary Beard (inset) in a new two-part documentary considering both historical and contemporary art. Works on which she fixes her gaze include the engravings of Otto Dix (1891–1969), whose depictions of the First World War led to him being labelled a degenerate artist by the Nazis. Plus Beard meets one of modern art's most fearless figures, Tracey Emin. **H**

Mary Beard's Forbidden Art

BBC Two / Scheduled for January



EXPLORE... ANCIENT HOUSE, THETFORD

A timber-framed Tardis

Incongruously sandwiched between shops and pubs in a Norfolk market town stands a Tudor building crammed with stories spanning more than two millennia of local history. **PRIYA ATWAL** explores Ancient House Museum of Thetford Life

Midway between the tourist hotspots of Cambridge and Norwich lies the Norfolk market town of Thetford. You might be tempted to drive past this unassuming little town, but I'd strongly encourage you to stop and visit. Stroll along Whitehart Street and, amid the shops and businesses, look for a beautiful timber-framed building: Ancient House, home to Thetford's wonderful local museum.

Stepping inside, you really feel as if you're entering a Tardis. Constructed of oak, wattle and daub, Ancient House is a rare survivor from the Tudor period. Built around 1500, likely for a wealthy merchant, it was home to a succession of shopkeepers and tradespeople into the early 20th century. Today, the building houses the Museum of Thetford Life, with each room exploring a different aspect of the town's past. Exhibits also cover its connections to national history, the British empire and the wider world.

During the Anglo-Saxon period, Thetford was one of the country's biggest towns and a major manufacturing centre. It suffered badly from Henry VIII's dissolution of local monasteries but its fortunes were revived again by Elizabeth I, who granted the town a charter in 1574 and visited four years later. In 1737, Thomas Paine – the revolutionary author of *Rights of Man* – was born just 100 metres from Ancient House. The museum encompasses all of this history, boasting a hoard of golden Roman treasure, beautiful carvings in the Tudor dining hall, and Paine's death mask.

Migration has played a central role in keeping Thetford's fortunes alive. Indeed, Ancient House and its fantastic collections might themselves have been lost had it not

been for the support of a surprising benefactor. The museum opened in 1924, having been purchased for the town by Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, son of the last maharajah of the Sikh empire, Duleep Singh, who had been deposed by the British in 1849.

Norfolk and Suffolk's links with Punjab and the wider British empire are woven into the museum's storytelling through its attentive focus on the Singh family legacy. Frederick was raised at nearby Elveden, which served as a substitute for the lost ancestral home of his father. The family left their beloved estate in 1886 when Duleep Singh attempted to launch a rebellion against the British in India. Frederick was soon back in the east of England, however, studying history at Cambridge (he graduated in 1890); later he settled at Blo' Norton, just east of Thetford.

He indulged his love for local history by amassing an extensive collection of portraits and artefacts, many of which are now housed at the museum he founded. Frederick would no doubt also have met Dr Allan Minns, a doctor from the Bahamas (and another Ancient House donor) who in 1904 made history when he was elected to office in Thetford, becoming Britain's first black mayor.

By the 1950s, the town had a population of only about 5,000 people. However, following the devastation wreaked on the capital during the Second World War, Thetford's local borough council rehoused thousands of Londoners and several businesses in the town. The upstairs rooms of Ancient House tell the story of this major relocation campaign, as well as giving a glimpse of the living arrangements inside the house over earlier centuries.

Today, the Ancient House team does a masterly job of showcasing Thetford's diverse history across a vast period spanning many centuries. **H**

Priya Atwal is community history fellow at the University of Oxford

// Norfolk and Suffolk's links with Punjab and the British empire are woven tightly into the museum's storytelling //

VISIT For more information on visiting Ancient House, go to museums.norfolk.gov.uk/ancient-house



ABOVE Ancient House was built with oak, wattle and daub around the turn of the 16th century, probably for a wealthy merchant
BELOW Displays explore the life of Duleep Singh, last maharajah of the Sikh empire, whose son gifted the museum to Thetford





The kitchen recreates domestic life in 1901, when Ancient House was occupied by rabbit warrener Thomas Newton and his family



The museum displays artefacts relating to Thetford's long history, including objects from the Roman period, and highlight local links to Boudicca

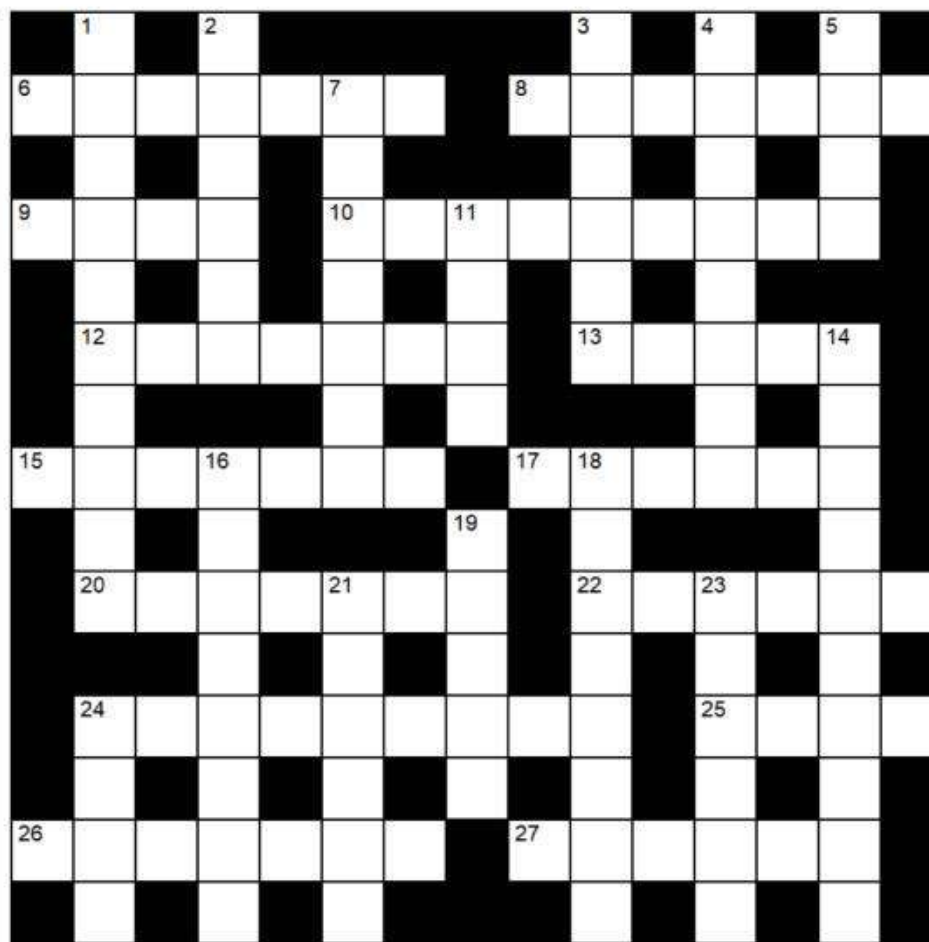
PRIZE CROSSWORD

Across

- 6** Member of a proto-Protestant movement initially led by Oxford theologian John Wycliffe (7)
8 Berlin prison where Rudolf Hess was held until his death in 1987 (7)
9 Eastern European city, centre of a Rus federation in the 9th–13th century (4)
10 In medieval Britain, the chief means of communicating news (of plague, battle victories, royal births) to a community (4,5)
12 The oldest institution of higher learning in the US, established in 1636 (7)
13 Palestinian political and military organisation founded in the late 1950s by Yasser Arafat and others (5)
15 Portuguese fortress near the Spanish border, twice under siege (1810 and 1811) in the Napoleonic Wars (7)
17 Scottish castle, home of the Bowes-Lyons, the late Queen Mother's family (6)
20 Queen of the Massagetae who, according to Herodotus, led her army against Cyrus the Great and killed him (c530 BC) (7)
22 Member of an ancient Nile Valley civilisation conquered by Egypt c1500 BC (6)
24 See 3 down
25 The political career of Cecil Rhodes was harmed as a result of the disastrous Jameson ____ of 1895/96 against the Boers (4)
26 Political family, descended from Irish immigrants, which produced a US president and a US ambassador to the UK (7)
27 Eugene ____, influential US dramatist, winner of several Pulitzer Prizes and awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature (1936) (6)

Down

- 1** Allegations, fabricated by Titus Oates around 1678, of Jesuit plans to assassinate Charles II (6,4)



2 Vessel historically used for the enforced transportation of captive people, for example from Africa to the Caribbean (6)

3/24 across Second millennium BC chronicle of the mythic adventures of a Sumerian king, possibly the world's oldest surviving work of literature (4,2,9)

4 Bloody battle of the American Civil War in September 1862 that led to Lincoln issuing an Emancipation Proclamation (8)

5 Family name of Henry VIII's last wife who, after the king's death, married her old love (4)

7 The smallest historic county in England (7)

11 The ____–Giles system of romanising the Chinese language, now largely replaced by the Hanyu Pinyin system (4)

14 Second-largest Caribbean island, named by Christopher Columbus on his first voyage in 1492 (10)

16 First name of probably the best known activist in the British suffragette movement (8)

18 Extrajudicial violence, usually of a racist nature, practised in the US South between the late 19th century and 1960s (8)

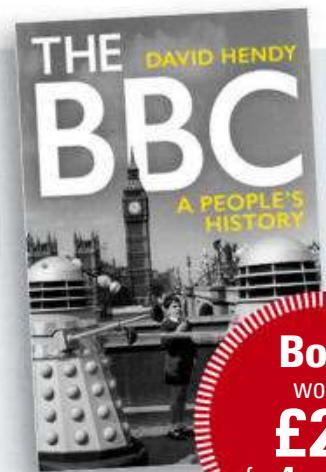
19 Anne ____, whose "heretical" views led to her interrogation, torture and burning at the stake in July 1546 (5)

21 Landlocked African country that gained independence in 1962 under Grégoire Kayibanda (6)

23 Powerful Italian family that included Lucrezia, noted for her political and rumoured sexual intrigues (6)

24 British prime minister who presided over the passage of the Reform Act of 1832 (4)

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth **£25** for 4 winners

The BBC: A People's History

By David Hendy

This engaging book traces the story of the renowned national institution from its inception in 1922 through to the present day. En route it explores the creation of television, the BBC at war and changing tastes and technological advances. You can read David Hendy's latest article on the BBC's history on page 34.

HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to **BBC History Magazine, February 2022 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to **february2022@historycomps.co.uk** by 5pm on **16 February 2022**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the April 2022 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at <https://policies.immediate.co.uk/privacy>. ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ☐ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct

Solution to our Christmas 2021 crossword

Across 8 Hiawatha 9 Magna Carta 12 Stein 13 Parthia 14 Speke 15 Atticus 18 Burkina Faso 20 Axis 22 Mutiny Act 24/1 The Pale 26 Holbein 27 Iron Age 31/45 Lin Biao 33 Lionheart 34 Hood 36 Penthesilea 38 Ridolfi 40 Ilium 42 Louvain 44 Cubit 46 Engagement 47/5 Clean Air Acts
Down 2 Carnac 3 Whip 4 Catherine 6 Artefact 7 Tarenorerer 8 Hussar 10 NAAFI 11 Tribute 16 Texel 17 St Mungo 19 Antioch 21 Stealth 23 Aviator 25 Philippines 28 Atoll 29 Shelburne 30 Faraday 32 Nanjing 35 Victory 37 Selim 39 Dachau 41 Magi 43 Nile

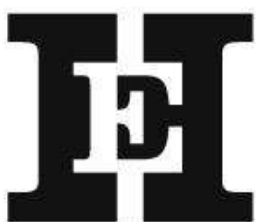
The winner of a bundle of history books worth over £200
V Wilding, Hampshire

CROSSWORD COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS

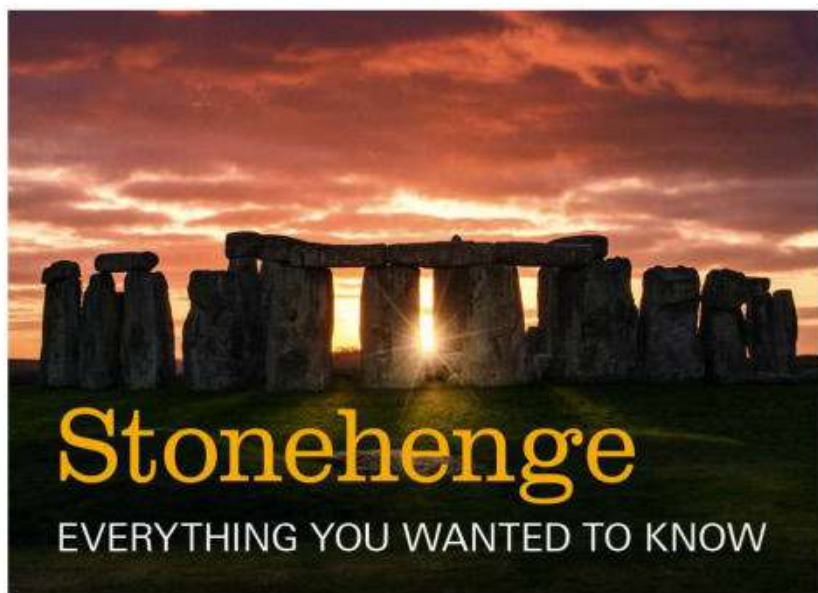
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To which powerful Italian family did this infamous woman named Lucrezia belong? (23 down)



Here's a selection of the exciting content that's coming up on our website [historyextra.com](https://www.historyextra.com)



Stonehenge week

Join us from 14 February as we dig into the history and mystery of Stonehenge. It's long been a subject of fascination, from the earliest recorded tourists (perhaps as far back as 2000 BC) to present-day archaeologists. We'll explore what's known about the origins of the stones and the theories about its construction – plus what it can tell us about prehistoric Britain.

[historyextra.com/stonehenge](https://www.historyextra.com/stonehenge)



The horrifying history of hanging, drawing and quartering

In medieval England, the crime of treason was so heinous that it required a horrific punishment. Rebecca Simon describes a method of execution reserved for the worst of the worst.

[historyextra.com/hanging-drawing-quartering](https://www.historyextra.com/hanging-drawing-quartering)



The Greek alphabet

From the Bible to college fraternities and the fields of maths and science, ancient Greek letters appear to be everywhere. Paul Cartledge gives us a primer on the history of the ancient Greek alphabet – and explains why it really should be alphabets.

[historyextra.com/greek-alphabet](https://www.historyextra.com/greek-alphabet)



Were medieval cities really filthy?

Film and television would tell us that medieval English cities were fetid and filthy, and that's without even providing us with the implicit aromas. But how much truth is there to the trope? Claire Martin reveals that they weren't nearly as bad as we might think.

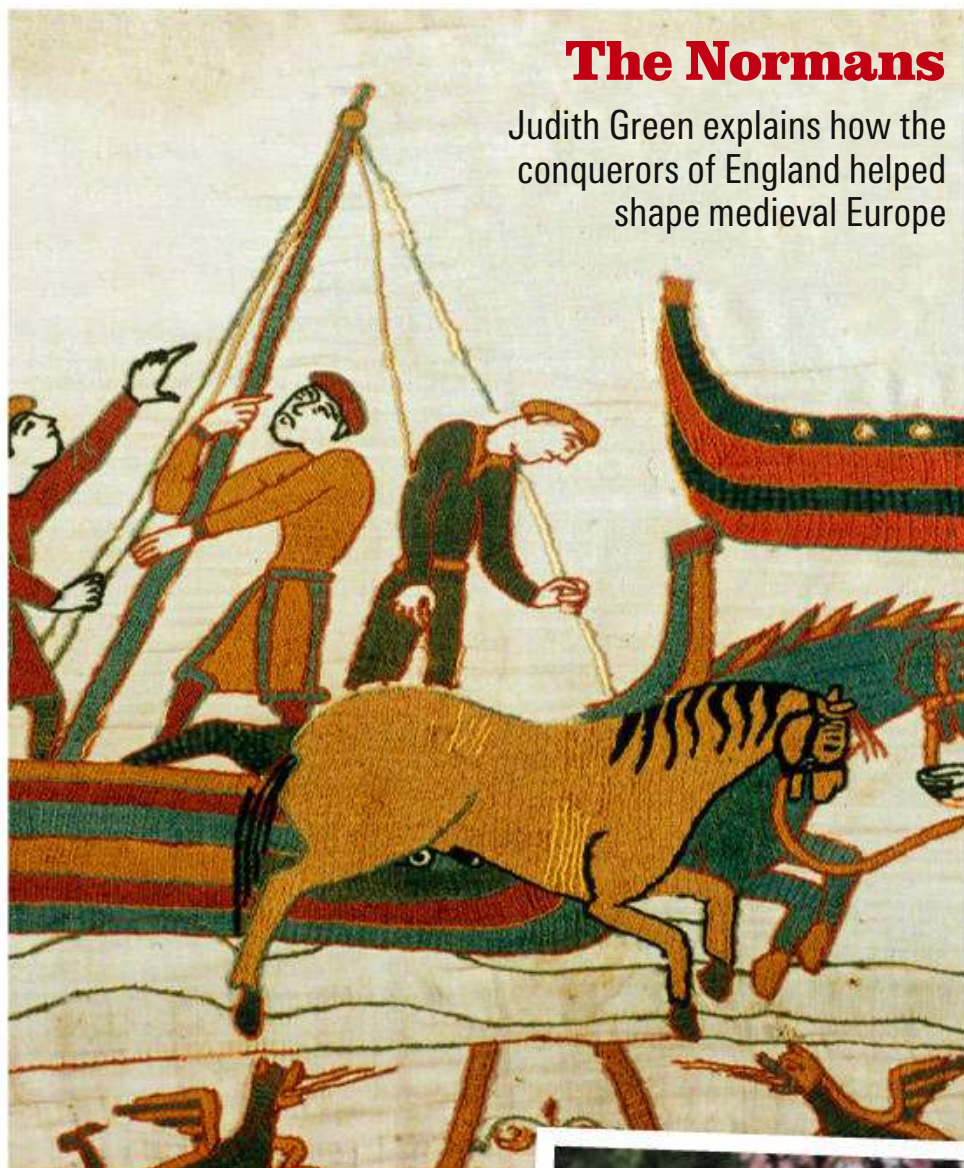
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NEXT MONTH

March issue on sale 17 February 2022

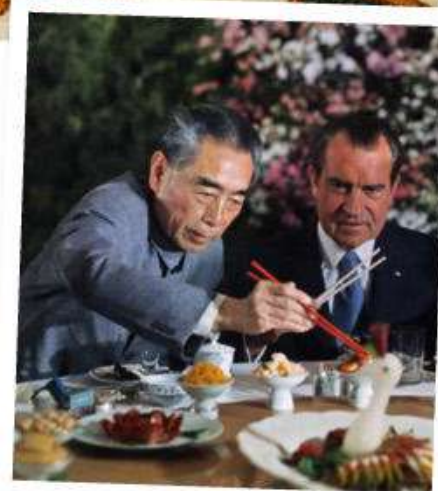
The Normans

Judith Green explains how the conquerors of England helped shape medieval Europe



A trip to the other side

Rana Mitter describes President Nixon's landmark 1972 visit to communist China

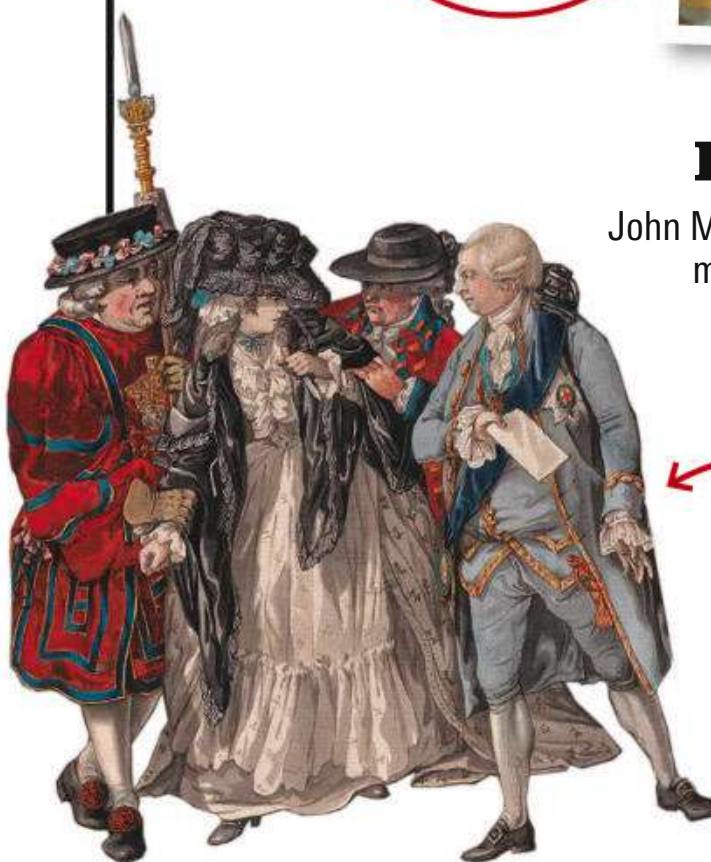


Dig for victory

John Martin reveals how Britain managed to keep itself fed during the privations of the Second World War

Forgotten figures

Lucy Worsley on three important women whose lives are now obscure



MY HISTORY HERO

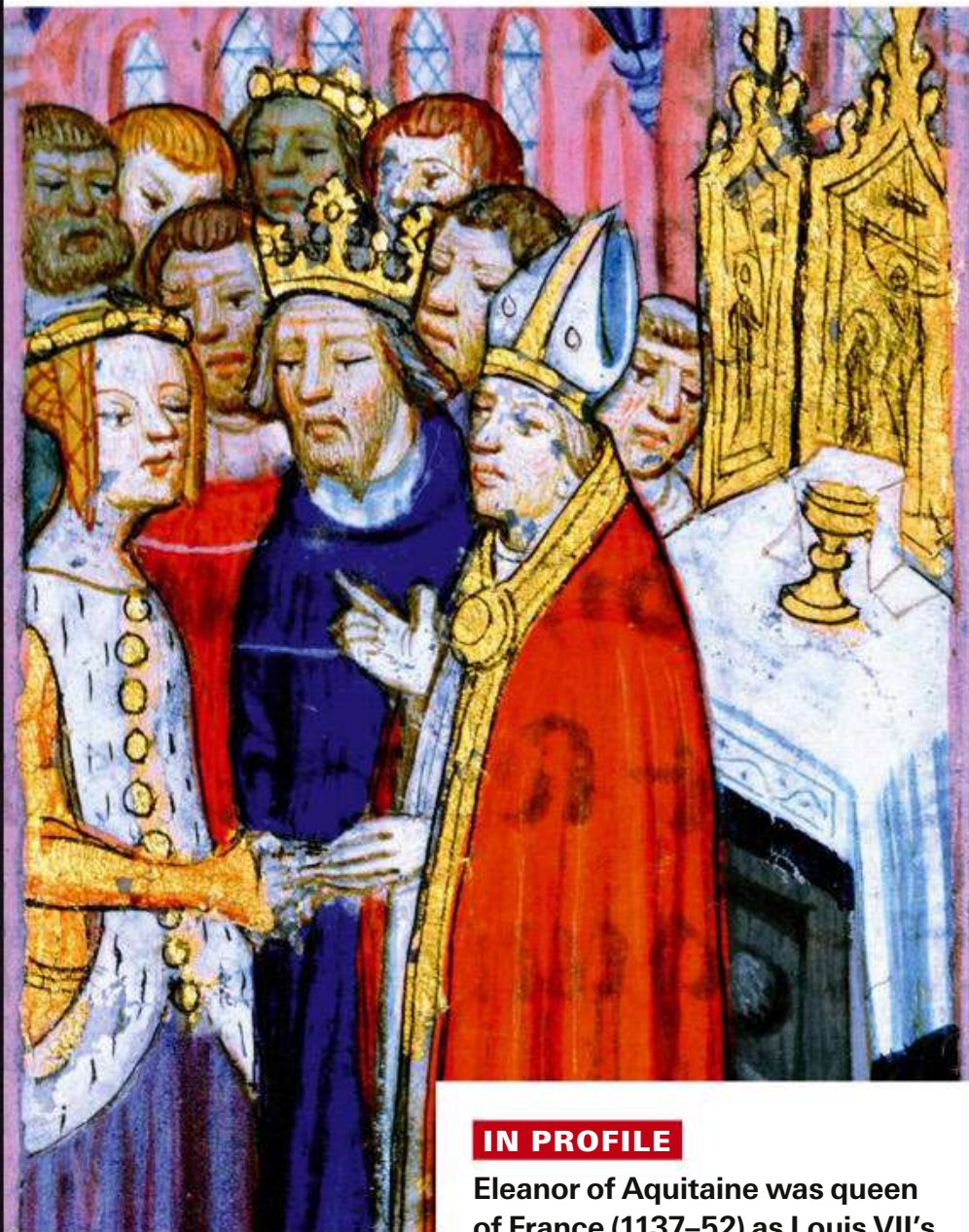
BBC broadcaster *Sarah Smith* chooses

Eleanor of Aquitaine

c1122–1204



Sarah Smith is a BBC journalist who is currently the corporation's North America editor



Eleanor of Aquitaine at her wedding to Louis VII of France in 1137, depicted in a 14th-century chronicle. "She must have had the most astonishing self-belief," says Sarah Smith

IN PROFILE

Eleanor of Aquitaine was queen of France (1137–52) as Louis VII's wife, and queen of England (1154–89) as Henry II's wife. She bore 10 children, among them two future English kings, Richard I and John. After participating in an unsuccessful revolt against her second husband, she was imprisoned for 16 years but lived to the age of about 82. She is buried at Fontevraud Abbey in the Loire Valley, France

// Eleanor ensured that the most important people in Europe dealt with her, a woman, on equal terms – practically unheard of at that time //

When did you first hear about Eleanor? On an episode of *In Our Time* on BBC Radio 4 a few years ago. I'm a medieval history fan so she piqued my interest. I then read a series of historical novels about her by Elizabeth Chadwick, in which Eleanor is described as "the most powerful woman in the Middle Ages".

What kind of woman was she? A strong personality, Eleanor was both a queen and a duchess (of Aquitaine) in her own right. She must also have been astonishingly resilient to have commanded the respect she did, and to survive some 16 years' imprisonment. Lastly, she was purportedly a great beauty.

What made her a hero? Eleanor was a remarkable woman in so many ways: married to two kings in turn, she served as queen of both France and England, and gave birth to two future kings. What's more, she was somehow able to ensure that the most important people in Europe – monarchs, popes and aristocrats – dealt with her, a woman, on equal terms, which was practically unheard of at that time.

She was rather cruelly subjected to a myriad of rumours about her sex life – including claims of incest, adultery and dressing up as a man – which has always been the easiest way to slander women who dare to put themselves in the public arena. Yet she did not allow any of this to deflect from her sense of purpose.

She was also remarkable for the longevity of her career, continuing to wield power into her later years. She must have had the most incredible self-belief to achieve all that she did – though she presumably believed that she was directed by God.

Is there anything you don't admire about Eleanor?

She made a dreadful mistake in backing her son, the younger Henry, against her own husband, Henry II, in the failed revolt of 1173–74. That was a serious lapse in judgment.

Can you see any parallels between her life and yours?

Not really – we live in such different ages – though there have been times when I've drawn inspiration from her resilience.

Does she deserve to be better known on this side of the English Channel? Absolutely. I studied medieval history at university, and she was not on the syllabus in any shape or form.

What would you ask Eleanor if you could meet her? Where her belief came from that women could and should be treated as equals. **H**

In Radio 4's *Great Lives*, guests choose inspirational figures: bbc.co.uk/programmes/b006qxs

LISTEN



Sarah Smith was talking to York Membery

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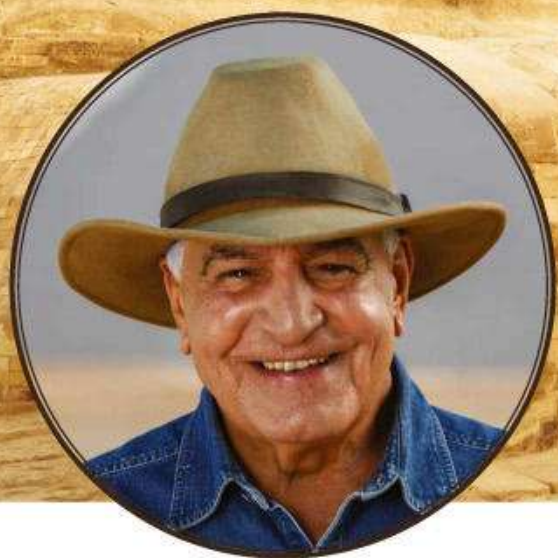
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